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ANTON CHEKHOV

UNCLE VANYA

TRANSLATED AND ADAPTED

FROM THE RUSSIAN BY

ROSE CAYLOR



NEW YORK

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TYPOGRAPHY BY S. A. JACOBS
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Дорогая мама:

Помнишь, как я тебе сказала что я
никогда Россию не забуду? Не забыла.

Роза.



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A "WORD" ON ANTON CHEKHOV



MY OWN opinion is that the art of Chekhov is not for the English language: witness the collected works of Arnold Bennett as evidence on this point. (For a good score of literary years, Bennett worked to apply this art to the English scene. He read Chekhov devotedly, was accused of it by his well-wishers, and ardently admitted it—all to very little result, unless boring a great and tireless following of English readers may be considered a result.) Thus, when I read the excellent translations into English of this play made by Constance Garnett, Marian Fell and Jennie Covan, I was invariably disappointed to find that they were in English. I am also a little appalled to find that this acting version, which I have prepared from the Russian, is also in English. And I can only assure the reader that a great deal of what was fine in Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* is thereby lost.

Language, unless it be pharmacopœial Latin or Esperanto, is moody. When a Russian says he is "heavy-hearted," he means something a great deal more advanced in feeling than this merely symptomatic phrase, but neither does he mean that he is miserable, sad, gloomy, or grief-stricken. It is simply a mood that has not yet emerged into any of these definitions, or, if a definition exists, it is one that only a Russian heart can explore. But I would like to cite an even more perplexing word—*skuka*. The literal translation is "boredom," but the truth is as far away as possible from the dormant condition in which your Englishman celebrates that word. It may be as tranquil as the Blessed Damosel, as wistful as the Peri at heaven's gate, as inconsolable as a cowboy singing "Oh bury me not in the Lone Prairie," or as lorn as Mrs. Gummidge, but it is never as bored as boredom.

How, without a great deal of false enthusiasm, a schoolmarmish clap-clapping of the hands and emitting of encouraging squeaks, is one to get the Russian and American to mingle for two hours in the theatre, in a suddenly auspicious party? The process by which it has always been done in the

past reminds me of the series of little books for children that used to be called and, for all I know, may still be: "Our Little Cousins in Sunny Africa," "Our Little Cousins in Chilly Labrador," or in Holland or La Belle France. Of course there was one introducing us to our little cousins in Far-Away Russia. And true to this childish tradition, we have always pretended a surface welcome to these little strangers. As we grew up we tried to understand their grand, gloomy culture as a matter of social obligation, and presently we grew so close to them that we even pretended to admire them most *au naturelle*; that is, reciting Dostoievsky to us in their own, dear, quaint Russian from the stage of the Moscow Art Theatre imported to New York.

To those Americans who have enjoyed this noble relationship with the Moscow Art Theatre, who have known Gorky, Chekhov, Dostoievsky this way, spontaneously, by a sort of æsthetic combustion, by higher intuition, or even mere social enthusiasm, this whole venture of adaptation and production will naturally be a total loss. But to those who will be satisfied with something less than this free union of spirits, and who will even extend their kindly

interest in our Little Cousin Chekhov to include his thoughts, there may be something in this current production, as sponsored by Jed Harris.

Speaking without any false enthusiasm, I have certain lingering doubts, on the eve of the party, that it can ever auspiciously "come off." To begin with, there is the language, which must lose in translation, first of all by ceasing to be itself, then, by being changed into a language in which there are no poetical equivalents, and also by the fact that the translator, alas, is probably no Chekhov. And, in the process of changing a Russian into an American, or at least an English-speaking person, how is one to mark the character's actions with the proper emphasis, subdue the merely national characteristic, which, in the original, would not be even noticeable, and underscore the really significant point? For instance, it is well known that a person who quotes from the philosophers in a Russian work is not really a profound person, and neither is he a comic bore; he is merely a Russian, and, in that language, his speeches would be scarcely noticeable. But, on the other hand, something seemingly unimportant may be quite pointed. The guests in *Ivanov* steal the brandy, and the hostess does not give her visitors

anything to eat. True, guests stealing liquor are no novelty here since prohibition, and there are countless women in America who do not feed their callers. But in Russia, as in ancient Greece, hospitality with food was almost a religion, and when the sin has been committed of not offering the guests anything, their stealing the brandy is shown as the most disreputable thing imaginable.

In *The Three Sisters*, a great deal is made of the fact that a woman comes in wearing a pink dress with a green sash. But this stage direction, unusual in Chekhov, does not imply that she is dressed with particular care or elegance, but, on the contrary, to express that she was dressed in extremely bad taste. It was then the fashionable joke in Russia to consider pink with green abominable, exactly as today it is considered beautiful, and combined by the most expensive couturiers, to say nothing of the flowers.

I am willing to grant that all would not be lost if, in a production of *The Three Sisters*, the original direction were allowed to remain, and Natalia Ivanovna, stepping out in her pink and green dress, were to startle the fashionables with her fine taste rather than her dowdiness. But those errors of fashion, extending as they do to speech, and even

to character, would create a false impression if they were allowed to remain, or even one opposite to what the author intended.

For instance, Astrov, in *Uncle Vanya*, finding himself in love with a gentle and modest married woman, calls her first, a wild animal, whom he then and there invites to devour him, and, in the next speech, *xoriok*—a skunk. It is true that he says she is a beautiful, furry skunk—but the startling combination of images is there. And it is said with such loving intent, with such a sense of gay and original diction. But obviously Chekhov did not hope that it would sound quite as original as it does in the English.

And Uncle Vanya, in addressing this same charming woman, tells her that she is a pixie, and what she had better do is plunge into the depths and disappear with some merman, so that they may all be rid of her.

I am sure that these playful speeches once struck some natural, colloquial note. But time and place are missing, as well as custom, training and numerous other anthropologic factors, and what was once colloquial, is now, alas, archaic. Whatever the value of these phrases was, it is now obviously lost to

us, and it would be better not to attempt to recreate it and addle our brains with it, to say nothing of embarrassing the actors. It would not only be better; it would be a great deal safer. While in print these phrases might escape the critical questioning of a kind and somewhat absent-minded reader, and even suggest their lost gaiety like signposts a long, long way from what they recall, on the stage, with actors' voices speaking them, and actors' bodies illustrating their old gallantries, they could only be curious. Worse, laughable.

How unfair such laughter would be to Chekhov, the comedian. In life, he loved anecdotes, in play-writing he was perhaps the only Russian who was never pompous. . . .

"It's appalling!" cries Madame Voinitzkaya, in this play, regarding some trifling matter.

"Nothing is appalling, Mother," says Vanya drily. "Drink your tea."

. . . And Chekhov was always arguing with the worthy artists of the Moscow Art Theatre that his plays were comedies.

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Which brings us to the translator's Nirvana—humor. Whatever the impossibilities of translation,

as soon as language abandons the field of the emotions and begins to describe that most "mental" form of writing, comedy, all difficulties disappear. Granted a certain amount of confirmed national taste on the part of the new audience, like the German preference for gastro-intestinal anecdotes, it seems to me that humor "carries over" easily from one language into another.

I am sure that *Uncle Vanya* is funny. There are those who, even while laughing at Uncle Vanya, will differ. They will think they are laughing at *Uncle Vanya* because it is *not* funny, or even because it is tragic. But loud and competitive though their guffaws may resound, they will still occur at the right moments in the play, and they will still be akin to Chekhov's laughter at life. I say this realizing the dangerous quality of the American patriot's laugh, the lurking mob spirit that may at any time overcome the meek conviction that all foreigners are *Art*, and the resultant holiday feeling that the listeners are all doughboys or small boys throwing stones or Knights of Pythias together. With Chekhov there is no chance of such a misunderstanding. Chekhov will always remain, to the boob, *Art*, and, to the enlightened, entertainment.

Let me explain: At worst, the humorous appeal that any Russian work makes in English is of two kinds. One is the cumulative appeal of a foreign point of view, usually reiterative of a far-away and remote tragedy to the point where it is laughable. This is the system of Stephen Leacock's *Behind the Beyond*, and all such parodies. The other is the purely hysterical hilarity aroused in some innocent hearts by anything Russian. It is the ancient appeal of the whisker. There are those gay and innocent spirits who immediately burst into laughter at the word Ivanov, and scream with pleasure at Kous-sevitzky. I have even known a risible Irishman who will laugh from beginning to end of any Russian book.

But Chekhov, in constructing a play, makes use of these two impulses to laughter. (The audience's tendency to hysteria or pleasure was as obvious a fact to him as any other fact of psychology.) There is no stupidity that could possibly be as aloof from his characters as his own sapience. Chekhov himself is laughing at their cumulative troubles. When still one more character in the play declares he is unhappy, the revelation is as lightly approached as any comedian's joke, and as consciously aimed at laugh-

ter. There is, in fact, a glow of happiness on the stage when this scene occurs; for a little while everybody is cheered by the presence of so much misery among them, and almost—almost—sees through it. But of course the laugh is reserved for the spectator. As for our foreign willingness to laugh at a name, listen to the line where Telegin brings in the name of his far distant relative, Constantin Lakedemonov, and you will see that the author is laughing at the Russian name as delightedly as any hoodlum. The entire play is pitched in this mood of gentle exaggeration; the characters are revealed as Dickens and Gogol revealed them, in the unmistakable colors of comedy.

It is a comedy of character. Its plot is the interaction of these characters on one another. Like all character comedies, it depends a great deal for its effects on the brightness of the language and the sharply defined characters, which are only suggested by a first reading, and which may be endlessly elaborated in the acting. Its greatness lies in the wonderful range of these characters—I mean from the intellectual point of view—particularly in the absorbing character of Dr. Astrov.

An admirer of Dickens' Eugene Wrayburn,

D'Aurevilly's Beau Brummel (no less than his account of M. deLauzun, Comte Peguylem), Beerbohm's George the Fourth, I was astonished at how truly and economically Chekhov suggested the dandy in Dr. Astrov, the man of form and style under the most adverse circumstances, an overworked country doctor, without proper associates and without hope. Here is a fellow whose every utterance shows manly pride of the most graceful order, who does not sympathize with a male friend in distress but tells him sternly not to hope because hope is weakening when it is useless, whose language is humorous, poetical, choice. A man who, one feels, despite the fact that he must live out his years curing uncouth peasants in the provinces, might have charmed St. Petersburg, and this without a single false or insincere gesture; that is, a man who lives a thankless life as handsomely as he would have lived an enchanting one. A difficult assignment; the more difficult that it is self-imposed, laid down from the remote judgment-seat of personality, and acted out to the last moment for the eye of the one inner judge, rather than the immediate applause of society.

And if Dr. Astrov's task is difficult (he, who had

a whole life-time in which to accomplish it) how much more difficult is Anton Chekhov's. In the space of a few pages, while outlining all the necessary details of Astrof's profession, his passion, and his relation to all the other characters, and without any evidence in the form of action, he must suggest all this. The wonderful thing is that he does, in the Russian.

It was this dandyism which I tried to bring into relief in making certain obvious changes in Astrof's character. I believe dandies (i. e., men with a sense of form), touch more lightly on their innermost aspirations here than they do in Russia, and now than they did forty years ago. We are more reticent on the subject of self-expression than we were before so many authors in the Russian tradition articulated it all for us. I am reminded of the quiet reticence of the Chicago gunman who told a newspaperman of my acquaintance that he didn't mind dying, but he had "some work to do first." What he meant was a little program of extermination.

Other changes were also planned to mirror faithfully Chekhov's superb intention and to reconcile changing fashion with his unchanging inner truths.

There is in this play a scene in which a charming and sincere woman, who has intimated already that she realizes someone loves her, is told by him that she knows this fact. She shrinks back and swears incoherently that she doesn't know what he is talking about. This obviously could not be allowed to remain. Forty years ago, fashion was probably inexorable on the point of an honest woman's shrinking before such a declaration, but today a woman cannot tell a lie before an audience and keep her characterization of sincerity.

On the other hand, gentlemen were certainly not held down by any such verbal modesties. One rather surprising deletion occurred on this point after the establishment of rehearsals. It was found necessary, in this "modern" production, to tone down Vanya's almost oafish sexual importunities. It may be that gentlemen have grown more moral (this, in fact, is the rumor) or that the Anglo-Saxon is less persistent than the Russ. But it actually seemed as if Vanya were nagging the lovely Helena too matter-of-factly for all our tastes. And his moral qualms were of the most perfunctory nature. As a matter of fact the Russians seem to make a great deal less fuss about adultery than any other nation, except pos-

sibly the French. It may be on account of those endless "discussions" that bring everything into the open. A friend who lived in St. Petersburg, and later, by duress, in Archangelsk, thought it was the long winters.

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So much for the deletions. The Chekhovian addict, however, careful on what he bestows his admiring chuckles, may look upon additions here and there as so many pitfalls for his prized discernment. (What if he should find himself laughing at the wrong line?) Nevertheless, too much stress should not be laid on this new material. At times, whether the result attracts attention or not, the motive of the interpolated line was merely mechanical, to cover an exit or entrance, or some mechanical oversight on Chekhov's part. In the first scene the professor ignores the doctor's visit and this pointed insult receives no comment from anyone, and no apologies are made for it. Also, the professor asks for his tea to be brought into his study, and this should be done, and with the appropriate mechanical sounds.

Still other additions are, of course, occasioned by the deletions themselves. The actors are on the

stage; they must say something. Certain relationships have to be established and even certain moods. The fact that some of these deletions occur in the climaxes doesn't help the situation at all. And yet even this new material should not be overestimated, either by praise or blame. It is very simple, when in the spell of a great writer's point of view and from within the strong walls of his artistic certainties, to invent attitudes and even phrases in the same vein. Book reviewers do it continually (and, I may add, unnecessarily) coming out in the borrowed plumage of Conrad, W. H. Hudson, Gourmont, attempting to better the master's own cadences in an extraneous and sometimes even hostile work, and even fancying themselves as stylists as a result.

And I have long wished to say somewhere that this talent for echoing the style of some master, with whose magic rhythms one is temporarily drunk, was never more ungracefully illustrated than in the case of that secretary of Anatole France's, whose name I do not wish to recall, who not only wrote a book of memoirs in the "inimitable" style, but confessed slyly to the authorship of a paragraph in France's work here and there. What is a paragraph? Let him create the work itself, the mood, the theme,

no less than the style, and then perhaps we shall remember his name.

[Brousson]

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In approaching Chekhov for a critical estimate, I shall not make use of any feline modesties or adopt any becoming postures of meekness. (Look out for the terrible meek. They not only will inherit the earth, but, like Zangwill's "schnorrer" who was to inherit the waistcoat, they will terrorize over the present incumbents and watchfully begrudge them their bit of soup here on earth for fear it will spoil the waistcoat.) There are many things I shall not do (including, perhaps, arriving at a critical estimate) but I can cheerfully promise my audience relief from the following mannerisms current in the practice of criticism:

I shall not, under pretense of praising Chekhov, attack the rest of Russian literature, or even literature in general. There are those unhappy souls, devoted to criticism, who must first disconsolately survey the whole (to them) gloomy landscape of literature and disparage it before alighting on the work in question with their ungenerous praise. Just as there are some reviewers who can admit that they

like a work only after a prolonged struggle with their feelings. It seems that they thought, for some reason, or many reasons, relentlessly outlined in the leading paragraphs, that they would never like the work in question, but, presto! at last, when they have already alienated the reader from it sufficiently, it appears that they do like it after all.

Neither shall I disclose to the reader, at the expense of Chekhov, my own mystic and inviolable superiority. There are those reviewers who, from their noble post of "mere human beings," presume to tell the author about the ways of life. Being in no way connected with literature, even by so much as honest ambition, they presume therefore that they are all the more strongly connected with life. Thus, they prefer to criticize a work from the point of view of reality, probability, etc., though that is by no means a guaranty that they will not also criticize it from the point of view of style before they are finished.

I shall only assure the reader of my good will toward Chekhov. How happy I am to be able to make this assurance, to promise that it will not come out that I am secretly an enemy of his! But in this friendliness I hope to keep my distance. I shall not

sneer mildly and explain to the author that I know him better than he does himself, that he has always misunderstood himself, and does not realize how great he is, and that his "real" greatness lies in such and such a direction. . . . In other words, I shall not invite myself and all my desires, demands and opinions into Chekhov's world, and become what Dostoevsky describes as "The Friend of the Family," the stern, self-invited guest in the house who is ever watchful of his own honor and comfort, who admonishes the host in his wicked pride and feels insulted at everything, who is exacting in the matter of his own standards, and never feels himself sufficiently entertained.

Of holy zeal for Chekhov, tempestuous enough to break all social considerations and belabor him with its ardent cries of faith, I have not a whit. The chief fault with faith, I have found, is that it is so ready to cry itself betrayed. One may live in Christ, it has been contended here and there by those who believe in his tolerance, but to live in an author, unless it be Nietzsche, who asked for it, strikes me as an unpardonable intrusion.

Neither shall I parade too consciously what

Anatole France so mistakenly called "the graces of the disciple." (sic. [Brousson])

All that is necessary, I believe, is to have read the author.

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Marcel Proust, in the fifth volume of his great literary document, which seems to come nearer to life than all contemporary literature, quotes a letter completely. Then he says that quoting it can give "*no idea whatsoever*" of the chemistry of anguish and suffering which it started in the recipient's mind. And he writes several chapters to attempt to explain it.

It is this feeling of inadequacy, of merely fragmentary significance, which the necessarily isolated speeches inherent in the dramatic form arouse in me when I compare them with Chekhov's other works.

But even this comparison is not necessary. His observation appears to me to have had too much content to find complete expression within the restrictions of the stage. Life appeared to him in an overwhelming entirety. His short stories and novellettes have been said to describe middle-class life completely, but how much more completely they described life. In each segment of his writing, there

was, as in life, everything. The people lived in houses, their houses had grounds around them and distant landscapes, or city streets. In a tenement, we are treated to a chemical description of the smells along the stairway (startling observation :) according to the education of those who live within. In a private house we participate in the elegant languors upstairs, the rollicking, full-blown life below. We know what the servants eat, what dress the mistress wore. Outdoors we feel the moisture in the air and the time of day, and the sight and stir of growth, of ripening, so minute, so pervading, that we are spellbound, lost within the imagined scenery as perhaps we have never been in actuality itself.

Chekhov felt these things so much, and so often in words approximated them. And how shall one suggest them in a method restricted to speech, and how shall one reproduce them visually? By hedges rows planted with little paper flowers, and trees hung with crêpe paper leaves, or worse, sketched on chiffon in *art moderne* form and aimed at the pages of the Theatre Magazine? . . . But where is the night-scented stock, where are the bees and the mignonette?

The argument might be offered that the superlative ability to recreate life in prose is by no means a proof of an inability to write convincing plays. This would be true, if Chekhov did not try to do approximately the same thing both on the stage and in his stories. In *The Sea-Gull*, *The Cherry Orchard*, and *Uncle Vanya*, nature plays a more important part than any of the actors. In *The Sea-Gull*, in fact, a pitiful little outdoor stage is built like a symbol against the majestic scene of natural beauty, and there it stands, its curtain flapping in the wind until life itself makes its last farewell to that beautiful, unforgettable landscape.

Galsworthy, who at times created a never-ending illusion in his novelettes, did not attempt to do it in his plays. He was simply a dramatist, and the speeches of his characters concerned themselves with the themes he was worldly enough to incorporate into his dramas (themes having to do with honesty, class tradition, intermarriage, etc.) a historical approach to drama which Chekhov despised even though Shakespeare, Molière, Strindberg, and most other dramatists have practised it.

Chekhov's plays had no themes. The one play, *Ivanov*, which seems to bring up what is usually, in

the drama, "a problem", that of intermarriage, is not in the least concerned with that theme. Ivanov is married to a Jewess. This may add to the pain in the subsequent rift in their marriage, but nothing is made of it, only the gossips happen to mention it. If any thematic thought were to be taken from the play, it might be a vague, poetic reflection, which, even to state it in words, I must paraphrase from Poushkin. "The heart cannot choose but love," Poushkin wrote . . . and, regarding Ivanov, the sad reflection might be made that the heart cannot choose but cease loving.

But Chekhov's fame has long been swallowed in the critical mumble of "amens," and here we stumble against the rapt critic who jumps on every omission as a sign of the writer's genius. (One hesitates to think of this critic's rapture if the author was altogether silent, or of his relief, when, at the author's death, he can make the pleasant reflection that now a splendid record will never be marred by anything more.) And now we are met also by the more insidious critic, who, enamored of "life" and its "higher" significances, in comparison with the mere play as an art form, sees in this lack of theme a virtue. (One might as well declare it a virtue in

a sonnet that it had no subject.) If it *was* a virtue, then, it seems to me, it was one that was lodged in his other writings, and not in the plays themselves. In his short stories it implied a completeness in another direction, an all-embracing viewpoint that was only able to picture life impartially, as each human being lives it, and without ever taking sides.

In a play, the theme is the *envoi*, the last message to the audience. And while, during the opening action and even in the climaxes of a fine play, the lack of theme may not be missed, it makes almost impossible the play's unwinding. In most of Chekhov's plays, the characters can only shoot themselves, and this in such a queer disjointed atmosphere, that in *Ivanov* the main character must do it suddenly, in the face of all the other characters (a feat as difficult as for a criminal to shoot himself in a roomful of detectives), and, at the end of *The Sea-Gull*, it is quite a surprise that Trepleff is dead, and not Nina. (It is in this respect that *Uncle Vanya* should be considered Chekhov's best play. The little grey moth-like theme of man's pursuit of the unattainable, and its elusion, hovers about Helena's last appearance on the stage.)

It might be interesting to recall what Chekhov

Introduction

wrote on the subject of traditional play-writing, through the medium of the young author, Treplieff, in *The Sea-Gull*.

“When the curtain rises on that little three-walled room, when those mighty geniuses, those high-priests of art, show us people in the act of eating, drinking, loving, walking, and wearing their coats, and attempt besides to extract a moral from their stupid talk; when playwrights give us, under a thousand guises, the same, same old stuff, then I must run from it, as Maupassant ran from the Eiffel Tower that seemed about to crush him with its vulgarity.”

If this is not contempt for the drama, then at least Chekhov was making strange hints in that direction, or enjoying a joke at his own expense. Neither do I believe that, as in the play from which it is taken, this was the protest of one who meant to revolutionize the theatre. All that Chekhov wanted, it seems, was to leave the drama alone. After writing the first draft of *Uncle Vanya*, he did not look at it again for eleven years. He explained wryly that he was a writer of short stories and novelettes, when the director of the Moscow Art Theatre asked him at their first meeting what his profession was. And despite his subsequent close

connection with that company, the small output of his plays in comparison with his voluminous other works shows his intention more than anything else, it seems to me.

Restricted painfully by the nature of his creative talent, unwilling to take advantage of the tradition of "drawing morals" to attempt a form of thinking new to him (and it must have also seemed tawdry and unrelated to life) and further checked by the fact that the soliloquy, with which Shakespeare rounded out his characters' speeches, was no longer in vogue, what, artistically, could he hope to accomplish in the drama?

Even the speech, which is the single free form of expression on the stage, does not mean a great deal in Chekhov's art. As a novelist, he was not particularly interested in quotations. It was not the speech of the character that interested him, but the motive for the speech. Thus, when someone makes a great deal of passionate talk about philosophy, the reader is confidentially informed that it was to "show off". When a middle-aged man contradicts everybody, it is to prove that he is still young and a radical. In his stories, the cream of Chekhov's psychology lies in his comments.

In the plays, there is the same true observation, the same transparency of motive, but the author is missing. We can only infer that when Dr. Astrov makes a long speech about the history of the district, he is really making love, or when Vanya speaks bitterly of the professor, it is because he loves his wife, or when the professor essays a witticism it is because he is about to pull the house down from over everybody's head. It is no wonder that Chekhov's letters to Stanislavsky were filled with directions for interpreting the rôles.

In these things lies the "weakness" of Chekhov's plays, in comparison with his other works. Beautiful, fragmentary, elliptical, they remain mere echoes of a larger life lived within the printed pages of his books. Echoes of omniscient statements made, of effects achieved by long descriptions, of life re-captured . . .

Perhaps, after all, the inconclusive quality of Chekhov's plays is only a reminder of the great integrity of his vision, the fact that, like all deep talents, he had his singular approach to life, and only that.

It is the case of the little bird in Anderson's fairy tales that could only sing its sad song about the

cruel stepmother forever in its tree . . . of the nightingale who knows only one tune in praise of nature, and who sings it even when blinded and in captivity.

“Farewell to a cherry orchard,” the nightingale sang with all its heart.

. . . and “Farewell to a placid lake by which lived a girl who fancied herself a sea-gull,” the song went.

“. . . Farewell, farewell to hope,” says this play.

ROSE CAYLOR

UNCLE VANYA

CAST OF
CHARACTERS

AS THEY APPEARED IN THE
JED HARRIS PRODUCTION OF

“UNCLE VANYA”

AT THE
CORT THEATRE

NEW YORK CITY

APRIL 15, 1930



MARINA *Kate Mayhew*

MICHAEL ASTROV, a Doctor *Osgood Perkins*

IVAN VOINITZKI (Uncle Vanya)
Walter Connolly

SONYA *Joanna Roos*

ALEXANDER SEREBRAKOFF *Eugene Powers*

ILYA TELEGIN *Eduardo Ciannelli*

HELENA *Lillian Gish*

MME. VOINITZKAYA *Isabel Vernon*

A WORKMAN *Harold Johnsrud*

Scene: Serebrakoff's Country Estate. The Late Nineties.

UNCLE VANYA

ACT I

The scene is a walled-in garden. On the spectator's left, under the trees, a table is set for tea. On the spectator's right, a trellised gateway in the garden wall leads into the house. Near the gateway, and facing the audience, there is a bench. On the other side of the opening, a rustic chair. The background suggests as much as possible the green atmosphere of trees. Marina is sitting down. Astrov is on his feet.

MARINA: Have a little tea, my son.

ASTROV: No, thanks. I don't think I really . . . want any. I wish they'd come back.

MARINA: Will you have a little vodka, then?

ASTROV: No—no. I don't drink vodka every day, you know. . . . Besides, it's too hot. The professor can't be so very ill if he's taking a strenuous walk like that. Did you say the trouble was in his legs?

MARINA: The trouble is everywhere. If you quiet one pain down, it comes up in another place. What with one thing and another, he manages to be sick

all night. But in the morning he won't even hear of it. He sleeps late, eats breakfast at twelve, and now, you see, he's marching around the woods. . . . Sit down and rest yourself a little, my son.

ASTROV *still walking up and down*: I will.

MARINA *thoughtfully*: If you've got anything on your mind, there's nothing like a glass of tea for it. . . . Let me give you some. *She pours it and holds it out . . . Astrov absently takes it. And she sighs.* That's better.

ASTROV: Marina, how many years is it since I first came to this house? Do you remember?

MARINA: How many years? . . . Lord help us. You first came here . . . let me think, when was it? When *she* was alive yet, Sonya's mother . . . God rest her soul.

ASTROV: I looked after her for two winters.

MARINA: Then it's eleven years. And maybe even more. . . .

ASTROV: Tell me, have you noticed. . . . Do you think I've changed a great deal since that time?

MARINA: Oh, yes, a great deal. Then you were so young, and handsome. Now, you're not so young. . . . *She looks at him appraisingly.* And not so

handsome. . . . *She laughs to herself quite cheerfully at the physiognomic pranks the years play.*

ASTROV: Yes. . . . I've changed. I've become a different man. I'm overworked, that's why. I don't know what leisure is. I'm on my feet day and night, and when I do get to bed at a reasonable hour once in a while, I can't rest for fear I'll be waked up any minute by an emergency call. I just lie there, waiting and waiting for the bell. How could I help growing old? Why, in all the time you've known me I haven't had one really carefree day. It's a miserable life. . . . Dull, dirty and miserable. And the worst of it is I've had no decent company around me, nobody gay or worthwhile or even dignified in any way. I've been surrounded by nothing but fools. Silly people. Lunatics of one kind or another. You live among people like that a year or two, and you get peculiar yourself. You don't notice it, until it's happened. . . . Look, what a ridiculous mustache I've grown—real mustachios! Yes, I've become as eccentric as the rest of them, Marina. I don't think I've lost my mind yet, but I've become a kind of an oaf, my better feelings have grown blunt—sensibilities, one calls them. Do you understand that? Yes. . . . I know you do, Marina. Good women like you understand everything that's said to them out of pain. You understand it instinctively, like a

child's crying. Yes. . . . I've gotten stupid. I don't want anything, need anything, love anything . . . well, maybe you, Marina. *He kisses her head.* In my childhood I had an old nurse who was very much like you.

MARINA *very gently*: I wish you'd have something to eat.

ASTROV: No—No. . . . This time it's not food your child wants. Let me talk to you instead, let me tell you—*He sighs with the recollection of the things he is about to say.* Why shouldn't I grow old? Things like that don't happen to everyone. You remember the epidemic in the third week of Lent—the typhoid. People falling like winter flies. . . . And there they lay in their huts, on the floors, in the dirt, stink and smoke. Calves . . . chickens, wandered around them . . . there were even suckling pigs. For days I worked, doing what I could. I don't even remember sitting down. I suppose I ate . . . sometime. . . . Finally, one day, I rode home . . . so tired. I hardly got into the house; I hadn't even caught my breath, when they brought a man in. A switchman from the railroad . . . accident case. I got him on the operating table, put him under chloroform—I had to do it alone, the assistant wasn't there—but before I even had time to reach for anything . . . he was dead. Well . . . what difference

does it make if one more man dies? That's the way I've come to feel . . . what I might feel today. But not that day. That day my sensibilities seemed to awake. My feelings, which had been absolutely dead for weeks—months even—came back to me then, unasked. I stood crying over the table—over that stranger's body, as if he had been some one dear to me—Worse, as if I'd killed him. Then I sat down, and closed my eyes—like this—and I thought: Will those who come after us, two hundred years after us, for whom we are now beating out the way . . . remember us with one kind word? No . . . they won't remember.

MARINA: Perhaps they won't. But God will remember.

ASTROV: Thank you. That was well said.

VANYA *enters from the house. He has been sleeping since luncheon and looks dishevelled. He sits and straightens his collar*: Hm . . . yes . . . yes. . . .

ASTROV: What's the matter, Vanya? You been asleep?

VANYA: Yes . . . very much so . . . *He yawns his way through the following*. This last month since the professor and his wife have been here, our whole life has been turned upside down. I sleep at the wrong time. At luncheon and dinner I eat all kinds

of foolishness. I drink wine. God . . . it's unhealthy. In the old days I didn't waste a minute. Sonya and I worked together constantly. Now she does all the work, and I sleep, eat and drink. It's no good.

MARINA: It's a new order. The professor gets up at twelve o'clock, even though that samovar there has been going since early morning.

ASTROV: Well, why not start the samovar at twelve?

MARINA *unbelievably*: Start the sa. . . . Oh, don't you make fun of an old woman, Doctor. *Like Madame Defarge, she knits the following accusations into the record.* Before they came, we always had dinner at one o'clock, like Christian people. Now we have it at seven, like God-knows-who. But then there can't be anybody in the world like the professor. He does his reading and writing in the dead of the night. And all of a sudden, at two o'clock in the morning, the bell rings. I put on my clothes and I run to him—*Confirmed in sitting as she is, her hands now make the graceful, calamitous gesture of some fleeing, Florentine nymph, and thus perhaps she sees herself.* But—all he wants is his tea. *And now the stern servant returns, who sits in judgment on the folly of her superiors.* So I call the servants, fire up the samovar, and serve him his tea. A new order.

ASTROV: How long are they going to be here, these heathens?

VANYA: A hundred years or so. The professor is going to settle down here.

MARINA *boils over suddenly*: Just look at this now. For two hours that samovar has been boiling for them, and what are they doing? Just walking around. *Serebrakoff's voice is heard in praise of the scenery.*

VANYA: Here they come. Don't upset yourself, Marina.

MARINA *who has overheard some extravagant language in the approaching voices, will not be calmed down*: I only hope the peasants don't hear such foolishness. There's no good in a master's walking around with his nose in the air, without bothering the peasants about how the work is done. Nothing is "wonderful" or "marvellous". Everything could always be done better than it is. That's right. *Serebrakoff, Sonya and Telegin appear.*

TELEGIN: When I look at the sky like this, Professor, my eyes weep. But honestly I don't know whether it's admiration or catarrh.

SONYA: Tomorrow, we'll drive to the far woods, Father. Would you like to? *She sees Astrov.* Oh, hello, Doctor. Father, here's the doctor.

SEREBRAKOFF *stiffly*: How do you do, sir? *He starts toward the house.*

VANYA: Tea is waiting.

SEREBRAKOFF: Please be so good as to send my tea into the study. I've still got some work to do today.

SONYA: But, Father, aren't you going to see the doctor?

SEREBRAKOFF: No, no! I have something on my mind that I must write down immediately . . . something very fine about the woods. Really I can't be interrupted. *He exits.*

SONYA: Excuse me, Doctor. I'll go speak to him. He'll see you in a moment, I'm sure. Please don't go away. *She follows her father. Telegin sits meekly behind the table. On the face of Astrov nothing remains of the insult he has received but a vague smile.*

MARINA: No, he won't see the doctor now; but two o'clock in the morning, he'll call me to rub his back for him. . . . Professor! When we were young and I heard a professor was coming to this house I thought we'd see a sensible man. *As she speaks, Helena has entered alone from the woods, carrying a hat, and slightly bowing, passes across the stage. Marina's mumbling is interrupted by her passing.*

VANYA: Isn't it ridiculous? It's such a warm day—almost uncomfortable. But the great man goes about wearing an overcoat, gloves and galoshes. . . .

ASTROV: He certainly takes good care of himself.

VANYA: And he must even carry an umbrella!

MARINA: If the professor wore his galoshes, you mark my word, it's going to rain. If it doesn't do another thing, his illness tells us just what the weather will be like.

VANYA: Did you notice *her*? How lovely she is, how lovely. . . . In all my life I've never seen anyone so beautiful.

TELEGIN *coming to life*: Ah—I tell you—Life is beautiful. Whether I ride out in the sunny fields or walk in the deepest woodland or even look at this table here under the trees, I am overcome with the wonderful goodness of life. The weather is so radiant, the birds whistle in the trees. *He whistles*. We are all living in the midst of such contentment, such charm—! What more could we want?

MARINA *quickly*: Have some tea.

VANYA *laughing*: Yes, I think that's quite right. Have your tea, Telegin.

TELEGIN: Oh, thank you, thank you. *Marina goes out with Serebrakoff's tea*.

VANYA: Such eyes . . . such an adorable being. . . .

ASTROV: Say something sensible, Ivan.

VANYA: What have I got to do with anything sensible?

ASTROV *smiling indulgently*: What's going on hereabouts?

VANYA: What could there be going on hereabouts?

ASTROV *still smiling*: Nothing new?

VANYA: If you want to know the very latest news in the world, particularly on the subject of female emancipation, you must ask that old magpie, my charming mother. I never saw anything like it. At her age, she's still twittering about women's rights. She gets all the newspapers, pamphlets and radical publications. With one eye staring into her grave, she keeps the other one busy looking up references on the dawn of a new life for women.

ASTROV: And the professor?

VANYA: The professor, as always, sits in his study from morning till late at night, and writes. "With straining brain and wrinkled brow, a little praise anon and now, he writes and writes and writes." Poor paper! He would do better to write his own story. There's a subject for him! The hero could be a retired professor—something between a well-

preserved biscuit and an educated fish, with a choice collection of diseases—gout, rheumatism, and chronic headaches, to say nothing of a liver swollen with hatred and envy. This trained fish lives on the estate of his first wife, because living in town is more than he can afford. He complains endlessly about his bad luck, though, as a matter of fact, he is astonishingly lucky. Well—look at it. A little deacon's son, he gets this fishy education, is appointed a professor, marries, first, my sister, a senator's daughter, wears her out . . . and inherits her estate. . . . *Bitterly.* Well . . . we won't say anything more about that. *Again, in a gay anecdotal pretense.* But the real hoax in this gentleman's biography lies in his so-called "works". For twenty-five years, he has been lecturing and writing about art, and he knows absolutely nothing about art. For twenty-five years he has just been rehashing other men's ideas about realism, naturalism, humanism, pragmatism, romanticism—proclaiming and publishing things that intelligent people know about already and stupid ones aren't interested in. In other words, for twenty-five years he has just been wasting his time. But what self-esteem, my boy, what pretensions! He says now he's retired. From what, for God's sake! What has he retired *from*? There isn't a living soul that knows anything about him. And yet look at him. He struts around like a demi-god!

ASTROV: My professional opinion would be that there's a touch of envy somewhere around your cardiac region.

VANYA: Your diagnosis, as usual, doctor, is correct. But why shouldn't I envy him? Look at the success he's had with women. You remember my sister. What a woman she was! Beautiful, delightful . . . as Balzac would say: "pure as the driven snow." Why she had more admirers than this man has had pupils. She adored him. And my mother—Why, after all these years, with her daughter dead, my mother is still proud to be known as his mother-in-law. She lives in a simply astonishing awe of him. And you see . . . his second wife . . . that gentle creature, that lovely being. . . . She married him when he was already old, and gave him her youth, her beauty, everything. Why? For what?

ASTROV: Is she faithful to him?

VANYA: Yes . . . unfortunately.

ASTROV: Why "unfortunately"?

VANYA: Because such fidelity is false from beginning to end. It sounds fine, but it's unreal; there's no truth in it. It asks you to believe that it's dishonorable for a woman to betray an old husband whom she can hardly tolerate, but it's quite moral for her

to strangle her poor youth and deny all her natural, vital emotions. . . .

TELEGIN *almost weeping*: Vanya, I don't like it when you talk like that, really. You know that anyone who could betray a husband or wife is a dishonest person . . . and might even . . . who knows? . . . betray their country!

VANYA: Don't bother your head about things that don't concern you, Waffle.

TELEGIN: But Vanya, let me, please, I want to tell you. . . . I'm experienced in things like that. My wife, as you know, ran away from me on the day after our wedding with a certain person she loved, on account of . . . my looks. But did I ever forget my marriage vows? No. I love her and am faithful to her whether she wants me or not. I help her all I can. I even paid for the education of the little ones she had by the certain person she loved. I gave up my happiness gladly . . . yes, gladly! But I kept my pride. Now what about her? Her youth is over, her beauty has faded according to the laws of nature, and the certain person is dead. What has she got?

VANYA: Listen, Waffle, don't always try to put the best face on things and draw an optimistic moral

out of everything. What's all this nonsense about you're *glad* to give up happiness, and you've got your *pride* left? You've got nothing. That's why people love you—because you're worse off than they are. You're unhappy, and you know you're unhappy.

TELEGIN *beaming proudly*: Yes, that's right, in a way I am unhappy.

VANYA: Then for goodness sake, stay that way!

SONYA *enters*: I'm sorry . . . you've had nobody to pour your tea.

TELEGIN *helping her at the table*: Your Uncle Vanya is a clever man, Sonya dear. He sees right through a person. So is the doctor a clever man—and, of course, the professor—the whole county is full of clever people.

ASTROV *to Sonya*: Well, doesn't he want to see me?

SONYA: He's shut himself up in his room, and . . .

ASTROV: Oh, well, the mere sight of me cured him. A very interesting case. I'll write it up in the medical journal. *Helena enters and sits behind the table. Sonya serves her tea. Astrov addresses her.* You wrote me that your husband was very ill, that he had rheumatism and I don't know what else. But he seems well enough.

HELENA *apologetically*: He was upset last night . . . and I got frightened. But . . . he's better today.

ASTROV: And I almost broke my neck to get here—galloped the whole twenty miles. Well, it's not the first time. Never mind. Now that I'm here I'll make up for it by asking myself to stay over night. That way I'll get enough sleep for once, anyway.

SONYA: Oh, I'm glad. It's so seldom that you spend the night with us. I'll see to it that we have a nice dinner, too. We have dinner at seven now, you know. *She gulps her tea, perhaps to hide her embarrassment.* Oh, the tea is cold.

TELEGIN *feeling the samovar*: My, my, we've let the coals go out. I'll go get some.

HELENA: Never mind, Monsieur Ivan, we'll drink it cold.

MADAME VOINITZKAYA *enters*: His name is not Ivan. *She sits down.*

TELEGIN: Not that it matters to anyone, but that's so. My name is not Ivan, but Ilya. Excuse me, ma'am. Ilya Telegin, or, as people sometimes call me on account of the pockmarks on my face—Waffle. I have a very interesting life story, which, if you have time, I'd like to tell you some day, ma'am. It doesn't take long . . . any time you feel like hearing something foolish. You see I live here,

if you will be so kind as to notice it. You can see me any day of the year at your table. . . . A long time ago—that is, not too long ago, of course, I stood godfather to our little Sonya. When she was only a baby. Your husband knows me very well.

SONYA: We couldn't get along without our Ilya. Would you care for some more tea, godfather?

MME. VOINITZKAYA: Oh, dear!

VANYA: What is it, Mother?

MME. VOINITZKAYA: I forgot to tell Alexander—I tell you I *am* losing my memory—that I got a letter today from Paul Alexevitch, in Moscow.

SONYA: A letter—what about?

MME. VOINITZKAYA: It's a pamphlet. *Pause.*

ASTROV *obligingly*: Was it interesting?

MME. VOINITZKAYA *violently*: Not in the least! He attacks the very cause which seven years ago he championed. It's appalling!

VANYA: Nothing is appalling, Mother. Drink your tea.

MME. VOINITZKAYA: But I want to discuss it!

VANYA: We've been discussing and discussing for fifty years, and reading pamphlets. It's about time we stopped.

MME. VOINITZKAYA: You act as if you don't care to listen to me any more. In fact, I must tell you, Ivan, that in the past year, you've changed so that I, your own mother, can scarcely recognize you. You used to be a man of unshakeable convictions, with an inspired point of view!

VANYA: An inspired point of view that never inspired anybody. *Pause.* An inspired point of view! You couldn't have said anything more devastating. I am forty-seven years old. Until last year I tried, like you, to fool myself with all that erudite nonsense, so as to avoid seeing life as it really is. But now, if you only knew! I can't sleep nights from sorrow, from evil rage, because I wasted my years, my good years when I might have been winning from life everything, everything that's so impossible now. . . .

SONYA: Uncle, please . . . that's so dreadful!

MME. VOINITZKAYA *angrily*: You talk as if your former convictions were in some way to blame. But they're not to blame. It's you yourself. You must remember that ideals alone are nothing, without action. One must act!

VANYA *sardonically*: Act! We can't all be perpetual motion machines, Mother, like your professor at his writing.

MME. VOINITZKAYA: Just what are you trying to infer by that? *But everybody quiets her and Sonya rebukes Vanya. The quarrel ends.*

VANYA: All right. I'll hold my tongue . . . hold my tongue and apologize. *There is a pause.*

HELENA: It's a nice day today. . . . Not too hot. *A pause.*

VANYA: A nice day . . . to hang oneself. *Telegin tunes his guitar. Marina appears outside, calling the chickens.*

SONYA: Marina! What're you doing that for?

MARINA: The speckled hen is missing. I'm afraid the crows have got her. *Telegin plays a polka. The others listen silently. A workman enters.*

WORKMAN: Is the doctor here? *He sees Astrov.* If you please, Doctor, I've come for you.

ASTROV: From where?

WORKMAN: The flour mill.

ASTROV *ironically*: Much obliged to you. Well, I guess I'll have to go. *He looks for his hat.* What a damned nuisance.

SONYA: It's a shame, really. Will you come back to dinner from the factory?

ASTROV: No, thanks, it'll be too late. Now where in. . . . *To the workman.* Bring me some vodka in the meantime. *The workman goes.* Now where did I leave my hat? *He is awkwardly looking for it as he speaks.* In one of Ostrovsky's books, in some sort of a play, there's a kind of a fellow . . . with large mustachios and small talents . . . like me. *He finds it.* Well, auf wiedersehen, my friends. *To Helena.* If you should ever care to look in on me, with Sonya, I would be very pleased. My estate is small, and not much to look at, but if you're interested in such things, I have a fine greenhouse and nursery, and the government forests are next to my place.

HELENA *with formal charm*: Oh, we'd love to see all that, wouldn't we, Sonya? *Sonya turns away. Helena goes on, perhaps with a shade of embarrassment.* I've heard that you love the woods. Of course, it's a very useful work, but doesn't it interfere with your real work?

ASTROV: Only God knows what one's real work is.

HELENA *smiling and shrugging*: Well, I hope it's interesting.

ASTROV: Yes, it's interesting.

VANYA *sarcastically*: Terribly!

HELENA *still the polite hostess*: You'll have to explain it to me sometime. I'm so stupid. . . . I can't

see anything particularly absorbing about the woods. Just trees . . . and trees.

SONYA *impulsively contradicting her*: Oh, no, it's marvellous. The doctor sets out new trees every year, and he's already got a bronze medal for it, and a decoration. And he tries to keep the old forests from being destroyed. If you ever heard him tell about it, you'd understand. He says that forests are the ornaments of the earth, and they teach man to understand the beautiful and inspire him with noble emotions. Forests soften a frigid climate. And where the climate is milder, people waste less strength in the struggle with the elements, and they're gentler, kinder, more refined. Their speech is politer, and even their movements are more graceful. Their philosophy is more joyous and the men behave to the women in an honorable and even noble manner. . . .

VANYA: Bravo! That was really very sweet, Sonya, but unfortunately, it doesn't convince me. So, my friend, you must allow me to go on burning firewood in my stoves and building my sheds out of lumber.

ASTROV: You can burn peat in your stoves and build barns out of brick. But that's not the point. You know I don't object if trees are cut down from necessity. It's wanton destruction that I'm against.

The Russian forests tremble under the axe, wild animals and rare birds are becoming extinct, and beautiful landscapes are disappearing, never to be seen on earth again. And all because it doesn't occur to people to bend down and pick up their fuel from the ground. Am I not right, Madame? One has got to be an unreasoning savage to burn up in one's stove all that beauty, to destroy that which one cannot create. The forests are growing smaller and smaller, and because of that, rivers are drying up, wild life is exterminated, the climate is ruined, and every day the earth becomes poorer and more ugly. *Vanya laughs softly*. Well, laugh if you like, and maybe it's an eccentricity on my part. . . . *To Helena*. But when I see the peasant forests that I saved from destruction, when I stand in a young woods and listen to the quiet murmuring of the trees I planted with my own hands, I feel that I've had some small share in improving the earth, and that if mankind is happier a thousand years from now, I will have been a little bit responsible for their happiness. When I plant a little birch tree, and see afterwards how it grows green and sways in the wind, my heart grows full of pride, and I . . . *The workman comes in with a small glass of vodka. Astrov takes it and drinks*. However . . . it's probably all nonsense anyway. Goodbye to all of you.

SONYA *taking his arm and accompanying him:*
When will you come and see us?

ASTROV: I don't know.

SONYA: Not for weeks again, I suppose? *They exit. Helena moves to the bench near the gate and opens her sewing box. Telegin plays a waltz.*

VANYA: Helena . . . are you angry with me? . . . *Helena shakes her head.* Then why do you avoid me? . . . You *are* angry. Tell me, at least, how I've offended you. . . . Talk to me . . . tell me what I've done. Anything is better than your silence.

HELENA: Why did you have to hurt your old mother and call my husband a perpetual motion machine? And this morning, at breakfast, you quarrelled with him again. How petty that is. . . .

VANYA: Suppose I tell you I hate him.

HELENA: You have no reason to hate him . . . and besides, I won't listen to such ugly things.

VANYA: Forgive me, if I talk to you like that, it's only because I know that you suffer from that old—
He stops abruptly.

HELENA: Yes, I know. You all abuse my husband, you're all so sorry for me. . . . This interest in me . . . you'd be surprised how well I understand it. The doctor seemed to make it clear to me for the

first time when he spoke about the destruction of the forests. . . . Yes. . . . And just as you wantonly destroy the forests, you destroy people, and soon, thanks to you, there will be no faith, no purity, and no capacity for self-sacrifice left in the world. . . . Why can't you look calmly at a woman unless she is yours? Because . . . the doctor is right. . . . You have the beast of destruction in you. You have no mercy on the woods, the birds, on women, or on one another. . . .

VANYA: The beast of destruction. . . . Did Astrov say that? He has a talent for exaggeration . . . and he isn't as interested in purity as you think.

HELENA: It's like you to say that. But I don't believe it. He has a sensitive, honest face. An interesting face. Sonya loves him . . . and I can see why. But I can't even get acquainted with him. He's been here three times already, but I can't talk to him or even be nice to him. He must think I'm very disagreeable. Do you know, Vanya, I think you and I get on so well together because we're both such backward, boring people. We're both such bores. . . . Don't look at me like that. I don't like it.

VANYA: How else can I look at you? Don't be cruel, Helena. . . . I ask so little of you. Only to let me look at you like this, listen to your voice. . . .

HELENA *coldly*: Vanya, you must not talk to me like that.

VANYA: In Poushkin's "Gruzinian songs", there's a phrase, Helena. . . . Let it speak for me. "The heart cannot choose but love."

HELENA: Forgive me. . . . All I want is to be alone. *She rises and goes toward the house.*

VANYA: I don't expect you to return my love. . . .

HELENA: Hush, please, they'll hear you. . . .

VANYA *following her*: Only let me talk to you . . . don't drive me away. . . .

HELENA: This is tiresome. . . .

* * * * *

SCENE 2

The dining room of the villa. There are two French windows toward the back of the room, on both sides of a tile stove. A buffet and piano are, respectively, on the audience's left and right. To the left is a round table, surrounded by chairs, on which rest many medicine bottles. In the center is an armchair, in which the professor is dozing. Helena sits nearby, also half-sleeping.

SEREBRAKOFF *waking*: Who's here? You, Sonya?

HELENA: No. It's I.

SEREBRAKOFF: Oh, you, Nellie. The pain is unbearable.

HELENA: Your blanket is on the floor. *She gets up and wraps it around his legs.* I'll shut the window.

SEREBRAKOFF: No, don't do that! Do you want me to suffocate? . . . *Sighs.* I had just dropped to sleep for a moment and I had a frightful dream. I dreamt that I had a wooden leg. It was my left leg, and it hurt so terribly that I woke up from the pain. No, this can't be gout, it's too much like rheumatism. What time is it?

HELENA: It's after twelve. *A pause.*

SEREBRAKOFF: In the morning, look in the library for Hegel. I think we have him.

HELENA: What?

SEREBRAKOFF: If you listened to me, you'd hear me. I said I want you to look for Hegel's works in the library tomorrow morning. I think I remember seeing them there. Ooo-oh! Why is it so hard for me to breathe?

HELENA: You're tired. This is the second night you haven't slept.

SEREBRAKOFF: They say that Turgenieff got angina of the heart from gout. I'm afraid that's what's the trouble with me. *He sighs.* Yes . . . our style is very

much alike too. Oh, damn this horrible old age. Ever since I've grown old I've been hateful to myself just as I've been hateful to all of you.

HELENA: You talk about your old age as if we were to blame for it.

SEREBRAKOFF: Admit it. I disgust you even more than the others. *Helena gets up and moves away from him, sitting down at a distance.* Of course you're right. I don't blame you. I'm not a fool. I understand. You're young, healthy, good-looking, and you want to live. I'm an old man, practically a corpse. Do you suppose I don't understand all that?

HELENA: If only you wouldn't say the things you do . . . it's that that I can't stand.

SEREBRAKOFF: It begins to look as if nobody can stand anything any more—everybody is suffering. Thanks to me, everyone's life is being ruined. Only I seem to be enjoying myself, only I'm blissfully happy. Oh yes, of course.

HELENA: Please . . . you're torturing me.

SEREBRAKOFF: I torture everybody—naturally.

HELENA *in tears*: This is unbearable. Tell me, what do you want of me?

SEREBRAKOFF: Nothing.

HELENA: Well, then, be quiet, please.

SEREBRAKOFF: It's funny. Just let Ivan start to talk, or his old idiot of a mother, and everyone is silent, everyone listens, but if I only open my mouth all of you begin to feel abused. Even my voice is offensive to you. Well, suppose I am an egotist, a tyrant, haven't I the right to be?—now that I am practically on my deathbed? Haven't I earned it? Now that I am old, haven't I at least the right to be respected?

HELENA: No one is disputing your rights. *The window bangs.* There's quite a wind outside. Let me shut the window. *She shuts it.* There'll be rain in a minute. . . . No one ever questioned your rights.

SEREBRAKOFF: What a fate! To have devoted my whole life to the arts, to have grown used to my few modest requirements—my classroom, my lecture-hall and my admiring colleagues, and then suddenly, for no reason at all, to find myself here in this wilderness! Day after day to see only their stupid faces, and listen to their worthless talk. My God, I still want to live. I love success. I love fame, and the stir of the great world. This is like exile. Oh it's terrible to grieve each moment for the lost past, to read of the success of others, to fear death. I can't do it. I haven't the strength. And you—you won't even forgive me for being old.

HELENA: I'm sorry for you. Oh, I wish I were old myself, then, maybe, you wouldn't mind it so much.

SONYA *comes in. She pauses in the doorway and takes in the familiar scene*: You see, Father, if you'd seen Dr. Astrov today, he might have given you something.

HELENA: S-sh . . . Sonya. It's no use bringing that up now. You'll only make him more nervous.

SONYA: But the doctor is in the house now. He came back after all. It's only that I hated to wake him. But if you want him, Father. . . .

SEREBRAKOFF: What do I care about your Astrov? He knows as much about medicine as I do about astronomy.

SONYA: We can't import the whole medical profession to treat your gout.

SEREBRAKOFF: I won't even talk to that crank.

SONYA: Do what you like. It's all the same to me. *She takes a seat.*

SEREBRAKOFF: What time is it?

SONYA: One o'clock.

SEREBRAKOFF: I'm choking. Sonya, hand me that bottle from the table.

SONYA *getting the drops*: Here it is, Father.

SEREBRAKOFF: Oh, not that one! Can't you get anything right?

SONYA: Don't scream at me. Some people may like it, but please spare me. I won't stand for it. I think I'll go to bed, anyway. I must get up early tomorrow.

VANYA *enters*: There's a storm coming up.

SEREBRAKOFF: My God, another crank!

VANYA *A flash of lightning*: There it is! Go to bed, girls. I've come to take your place.

SEREBRAKOFF: No, no! Don't leave me alone with him. Please! He'll talk me to death.

VANYA: I'm not interested in talking to you. I've come here because they need some rest. They haven't slept in two nights.

SEREBRAKOFF: All right then, let them go, but you go first. Thank you. Please go. I beg you. In the name of our former friendship please don't bother me tonight. Let's see each other some other time.

VANYA: Our former friendship. . . . Our former—

SEREBRAKOFF: There you go—!

SONYA: Hush . . . Uncle Vanya!

SEREBRAKOFF *to Helena*: Darling, don't leave me alone with him, please. He'll be the death of me with his talking.

VANYA: This is laughable. . . . *Marina comes in, with a candle.*

SONYA: You ought to be in bed, Marina. It's so late.

MARINA: No . . . no. I can't go to bed. My work isn't done.

SEREBRAKOFF: Nobody can go to bed. Everybody must die on his feet. Only I enjoy myself.

MARINA *tenderly, to the professor*: What is it, my son. Does it hurt? My own legs nag and nag at me, too. When it's going to rain, it's got to hurt. *She fixes his shawl.* It's your old illness. My other baby . . . Sonya's little mother, used to stay up nights with it, she wasted away over it. . . . How she used to love you. Yes, yes. The old are like little children, they like to be made much of, but nobody feels sorry for them, somehow. *She kisses his shoulder.* Come, my blessed one, we'll go to bed. I'll make you some lime-flower tea. I'll warm your little feet. I'll say a little prayer to God for you. . . .

SEREBRAKOFF *touched*: Yes. . . . We'll go, Marina.

MARINA: My own legs nag and nag at me, too. But then, I'm so much older than you. . . . You're just

like a baby to me. . . . There we are. Take it easy. You're sick, poor thing. . . . Yes. . . . I remember Sonya's mother—how she used to worry, how she cried and cried over you. . . . Easy . . . easy . . . my son. . . . *She goes out, leading him.*

HELENA: I'm so tired . . . I can hardly stand up.

VANYA: He tired you out. . . . He tired us all out. I haven't slept for three nights myself.

HELENA: Oh, it's dreadful in this house. . . . Your mother, hating the whole world and thinking only of the future, poor thing. Alexander, so irritable and suspicious, and Sonya . . . why is she angry with me? *Vanya shrugs his shoulders.* She hasn't spoken to me for two weeks. . . . And you, Vanya, even you. . . .

VANYA *with some violence*: I? What have I done to you? What have I done to deserve these reproaches?

HELENA: You're so wise. . . . Vanya, so intelligent. Surely you ought to understand that the peace of a house is seldom destroyed by real calamities, arson or murder, but by hatred and malice and all these petty quarrels. You ought to try to smooth things over instead of stirring them up. *There is a pause.* I can't help thinking . . . how different you were when I first came to this house. Long ago, before I

was married. You and Dr. Astrov were such good friends then, and you were both so kind to me, and so gallant . . . ! my head was quite turned, and I thought you were probably two of the most brilliant and charming young men in the world.

VANYA: But not so brilliant and charming as the professor. *Pause.* Soon the rain will be over, and everything in nature will sigh and be refreshed. Only I will not be cooled by the storm. Day and night like a phantom, the thought follows me—that my life has been hopelessly lost—forever. The past wasted on meaningless nothings, the present so anxious, so full of hopeless questionings. . . . What shall I do with my life and love? What's going to become of them? This feeling in my heart will be lost like a ray of sunshine is lost in an abyss, and my life will be lost with it.

HELENA: When you talk to me like that . . . I don't know what to say to you. Forgive me, I have nothing to say to you . . . goodnight.

VANYA *barring her way*: What are you waiting for? What wretched morality stands in your way? Oh, listen to me, listen to me. . . .

HELENA: Ivan, you're drunk.

VANYA: Maybe I am . . . maybe. . . .

HELENA: Where's the doctor?

VANYA: In there. He's spending the night with me.

HELENA: And you've been drinking with him? Why?

VANYA: I get a taste of life that way, that's why. Don't try to stop me, Helena.

HELENA: In the old days, you would not have spoken to me that way. Then you were proud, sensitive, considerate. . . . You were a man. You would have tried to make things easier for me, you would have helped me. . . .

VANYA *pitifully*: Don't reproach me any more, Helena, you know I'd give my life for you.

HELENA: What would I do with it, Vanya? I hardly know what to do with my own life. All I know is, I would like to live it peacefully, and even, in a way . . . happily. You know . . . I studied music at the conservatory, and I used to think . . . as girls do . . . perhaps I shall become a great pianist, an artist. And then I thought . . . I'll live so beautifully that everyone will admire me . . . and say. "How happy she is . . . how beautifully she lives. . . ." I don't know what I meant, but I used to think that way. But that, as you see, was not my fate, and now I'd like to live beautifully here. I can't explain it, but that's all I ask of life. And perhaps you'll help me, won't you? Please forget about anything else. I tell

you, Vanya, even if I were in love with you, I would only say what I'm saying now. Goodnight, dear friend. *She goes quietly out.*

VANYA *alone, his head bowed, over the table*: She's gone. . . . Oh, Helena . . . Helena, "long ago—" you said, I wasn't like this. Oh, why didn't I love you then? Why didn't I marry you? You were seventeen then, and I was thirty-seven. Oh, it was all so easy, then, so easy. . . . You would have been my wife now. . . . Yes. . . . She would have been wakened now by the lightning, the thunder would have frightened her, and I would have held her in my arms and whispered, "Don't be afraid . . . I'm here." Oh, wonderful dream, so sweet that I smile to think of it. . . . Oh my God, my thoughts lose their way in my head. Why doesn't she understand me? Why doesn't she want me? Oh, I hate her, I hate her . . . her lifeless morality, her maddening theories, everything, everything. . . . *Astrov comes in, in shirt-sleeves, but without a vest or collar. He is tipsy. He is followed by Telegin and his guitar.*

ASTROV: Music!

TELEGIN *whispering*: But people are sleeping, doctor.

ASTROV: Music! *Telegin begins to play softly. You alone here? He breaks into a song and dance,*

peasant fashion. "Dance my house and dance my table, the master must sleep in the stable." The storm woke me. It was a noble rain. What's the time?

VANYA: The devil knows.

ASTROV: I thought I heard the beautiful Helena's voice.

VANYA: She just left.

ASTROV: Delicious woman. *His tipsy eye is attracted by the table.* Medicines! From every province in our great country! Who was it said a rolling stone gathers no prescriptions? *He studies the labels gleefully.* Why! he's had his gout out at every station from here to Moscow. . . . Is he really sick, or just pretending?

VANYA: He's sick enough.

ASTROV: And what are you so glum about? Are you sorry for the professor?

VANYA: Oh, let me alone.

ASTROV: Or in love with his wife?

VANYA: She's my friend.

ASTROV: Ah, already?

VANYA: Don't talk such vulgar nonsense.

ASTROV *laughs enthusiastically*: Yes . . . I must admit I've become a vulgarian. Besides, I'm drunk. Usually I only get drunk once a month. And when I'm thoroughly drunk, my insolence and effrontery are really wonderful. I feel capable of anything. I try out the most difficult operations and I do them magnificently, and I make the most extensive plans for the future. At such times I don't see myself as this stupid fellow that you know, but I think I'm the world's greatest benefactor. I seem to have my own personal system of philosophy, and you, my boys, seem to be so many insects, or bacteria. Play! Waffle!

TELEGIN: My dear boy, I would, with all my heart, but do listen to reason . . . the whole house is asleep.

ASTROV: You play! *Telegin plays*. What we need is a drink. Let's see . . . I think we've still got some whiskey left. And when it gets light, we'll all go to my house. I've got a funny new assistant. A terrible thief. You'll love him. *Sonya comes in*. Excuse me, I haven't got a collar on. *He goes out quickly. Telegin after him, on tiptoe, hiding the guitar guiltily*.

SONYA: Uncle Vanya, you've been drinking with the doctor again. You're a fine pair. I know he's always been like that, but you, how could you, at your age? It's so unbecoming.

VANYA: This is one thing in which age makes no difference. When there isn't anything real in one's life . . . one must pretend. Anyway, it's better than nothing.

SONYA: The hay is all cut, and getting rotten in the rain, and here you are, busy pretending. Have you given up the farm altogether? I have to do everything myself, until I'm at the end of my strength. *Frightened.* Why, Uncle Vanya, there are tears in your eyes!

VANYA: What tears? . . . Nonsense . . . a drunkard's tears . . . You looked at me just now as your dear mother used to look. My poor darling. *He kisses her.* Sister, dearest sister . . . where are you now? Oh, if you only knew, if you only knew everything. . . .

SONYA: What, Uncle Vanya? If she knew what? . . .

VANYA: Never mind . . . some other time. It's nothing. Nothing. *He goes.*

SONYA *impulsively knocking at the door behind which Astrov disappeared*: Dr. Astrov? Are you awake? One minute, please . . .

ASTROV: Right away. *He comes out, with his coat and tie on.* What can I do for you?

SONYA: It's about my uncle. I was talking to him just now . . . and I could see he had been drink-

ing. If you had only seen how pitiful he looked. So unhappy, with tears in his eyes. You know, when a man is unhappy like he is, he mustn't lose control of himself, must he? And so—I'm going to ask you—never let my uncle drink with you, please.

ASTROV: All right. We won't drink together any more. I'll go home at once. That's settled, and entered in the book. By the time they harness my horses, it'll be daylight.

SONYA: It's still raining. Wait till morning.

ASTROV *earnestly drunk*: No . . . the storm is blowing over. This is probably the tail end of it. I'll go. And now, will you do something for me? Please don't ask me to come and see your father any more. I tell him it's gout, and he says it's rheumatism. I tell him to lie down, and he sits up. Besides . . . he won't even see me when I do come.

SONYA: He's spoiled . . . Oh, now you're angry with me.

ASTROV: No, not in the least.

SONYA: Then stay . . . and have a bite with me. Otherwise I'll know you're angry. Please!

ASTROV: Thanks. I'll have a bite, and try to get sober.

SONYA *blurting everything at once*: I love to eat at

night. I think we'll find something here. They say he's been awfully successful with women, and that they spoiled him. Here, have some of this cheese. *They sit at the table. Astrov eats, Sonya only watches him absorbedly and pushes the food toward him.*

ASTROV *confidingly drunk*: I've done nothing but drink today. I *am* hungry. Your father has a very difficult nature. I suppose I may drink with you? *He pours himself a glass.* Do you know, I don't think I'd survive in this house a month, the atmosphere would choke me. What a funny lot you people are. Your father has practically disappeared into his studies and his gout, your Uncle Vanya is always complaining, your grandmother fighting to the last ditch, and your stepmother . . . *These candid estimates are a trifle smothered in cheese, raisins, nuts and are not clarified by additional drinks.*

SONYA: What about my stepmother?

ASTROV: In a human being, everything ought to be beautiful—the face, the clothes, the soul, the thoughts. She is lovely, there would be no use denying it, but what else do we know about her? What does she think . . . who is she . . . what is behind her pale eyelids, inside her small blonde head? She drifts about here, mysterious, fascinating, but she isn't interested in fascinating us. She doesn't even

want to please us. She's like a firefly that arrests our attention, but it gives no light, and no warmth . . . nothing. Well, maybe I'm judging her too severely. Like your Uncle Vanya, I'm a great malcontent, and we've both become tremendous faultfinders.

SONYA *as if trying to divine the Supreme Intelligence*: You're not contented with life?

ASTROV: I adore life as life, but this obscure, provincial, stationary life here, I can't abide, and as for my own, personal life, by God, it's hopeless. No . . . I don't see any light at all . . . I don't expect anything any more, and I don't care for people. It's a long time since I've really cared for anyone.

SONYA *fondly*: You don't care for anyone?

ASTROV: No one. I only feel a sort of tenderness for your old nurse, for old times' sake. The peasants are all alike, uncivilized and dirty, and the so-called educated classes are hard to get along with. They bore one. Oh, well . . . they're stupid. And those that have brains are hysterical, and have a mania for self-analysis and introspection. They're forever whining, or they're full of unhealthy envy and gossip. They sidle up to a person, look at him cross-eyed, and declare: "This one is a hypocrite." "That one is a wind-bag." Or if they don't know what else to label you with, you're "queer." I like the woods.

I'm queer. I don't eat meat—that's queer. Simple, straightforward attitudes toward people and nature no longer exist. *Now he reaches for the bottle again, but Sonya stops him, her hand on his.*

SONYA: I beg you, I implore you . . . don't drink any more.

ASTROV: Why not?

SONYA: It doesn't seem to be like you. You're so distinguished, your voice is so—kind. And you're even so—handsome, more handsome than anybody I know. Then why do you do something so common, like those others, who only drink and play cards. Oh, don't do it, I ask you. You always say that people don't create, but only destroy those things which were given to them by a higher being. Then why do you destroy yourself that way . . . ? Oh, you mustn't, I really beg you, I beg it of you.

ASTROV *gives her his hand*: I won't drink any more.

SONYA: Promise me.

ASTROV: My word of honor.

SONYA: Oh, thank you.

ASTROV *indifferently*: There! I've given it up. I'm sober, and I'm going to stay sober, to the end of my days. *He looks at his watch.* Keep an eye on me, my dear. It's good for me. You see, I'm like your Uncle

Vanya . . . I mustn't drink, or I lose control. My head is too easily turned. Beauty seems to overwhelm me . . . I get wild notions. *He first looks in the direction in which Helena has previously gone, then covers his face with his hand.*

SONYA: What is it?

ASTROV *lying*: Nothing. . . . During Lent, one of my patients died under chloroform.

SONYA: I wish you would forget about that. . . . *But her own hopes are too strong and she reverts to them unconsciously.* But what I can't understand is what you said to me just now . . . about not caring for people. Doesn't it mean anything to you to know that people love you—that wherever you go, you attract love?

ASTROV: No . . . nothing.

SONYA: But if someone was actually in love with you, a woman, I mean, and told you so, wouldn't that mean anything?

ASTROV: I don't know . . . probably . . . nothing at all. I'd have to explain to her, or let her see . . . that I couldn't return her love, that my head is full of other things. . . . Well, if I'm going, it's time I was off. Say goodbye, my dear, or we'll stand here talking till morning. *Shakes hands precipitately.* I'll go through the sitting room, or I'm afraid your uncle

might detain me. *He goes. Sonya remains staring raptly at the table on which are the things he handled.*

HELENA enters. *She looks at Sonya wistfully and speaks to her:* The storm is over. *Sonya does not reply and Helena opens the window she had shut before.* What a delicious night. . . . And then, still *hopefully.* Where's the doctor?

SONYA: He's gone.

HELENA: Sonya!

SONYA: What?

HELENA: How much longer are you going to be angry with me? We haven't done any wrong to each other. Then why do we have to be enemies? Haven't you had enough of that?

SONYA: I myself . . . wanted to . . . *She embraces her.* Let's be friends.

HELENA: With all my heart. *They embrace, and are both upset.*

SONYA: Is Father asleep?

HELENA: No. He's still sitting up . . . isn't it funny. . . . We haven't spoken to each other for weeks and weeks . . . and neither of us knows why. *She sees the things on the table.* Have you been having supper?

SONYA: Dr. Astrov had something.

HELENA: Here's some wine. Let's drink to our friendship.

SONYA: Yes . . . let's.

HELENA: Out of the same glass, like they do. That's the way. To you!

SONYA: To you! *They drink and kiss each other.*
I wanted to make up long ago . . . but, somehow,
I was ashamed to. . . .

HELENA: Why are you crying?

SONYA: I don't know. It's nothing.

HELENA: I'm such a fool . . . I'm crying, too.
You're angry with me, because you think I married
your father for the wrong reasons . . . because he
was a professor, maybe, and a well-known man. But
I married him for love. I know now it wasn't real
love, it was all made up, but I was so innocent, I
didn't know. And ever since then you've looked
at me . . . so . . . with your clever, suspicious
eyes . . .

SONYA: Darling . . . let's forget it.

HELENA: You shouldn't look at people like that . . .
it isn't nice. And you ought to trust people, or life
gets so . . . mixed up. . . .

SONYA *perhaps overcome by a secret bliss*: Tell me, honestly, as a friend, are you happy?

HELENA *sadly*: No.

SONYA: I knew it . . . But I'm so happy—is it silly of me? I'm happy because . . . *She stops*. I'd like to ask you something else.

HELENA: All right . . . you baby. Ask me “something else.”

SONYA: Do you like the doctor?

HELENA *surprised*: Yes . . . very much.

SONYA *laughing to herself, uncontrollably*: I have a silly face, haven't I? I'm happy because he was here, and I told him he was distinguished, and he had a kind voice, and that I thought he was handsome. Was it wrong of me? He is gone, but his voice still caresses me, it rings in the air. I hear his footsteps . . . if I look in that dark window, his face appears to me. Let me tell you everything. But I can't . . . I can't say it out loud. Oh, why am I so plainlooking. It's terrible to be so plain.

HELENA *taking her by the arms*: But you're not. You're lovely.

SONYA *shaking her head sadly*: The other day, as I came out of church, I heard a woman say: “She's a dear, noble girl, what a pity she isn't a beauty.”

HELENA *studying her*: You're beautiful . . . but you're not a beauty. I don't know what it is . . . the difference. People say about one woman that she's a beauty, but about another one they don't say it. Maybe that's what the difference is. Maybe some day you'll hear someone say: "She's a beauty." And ever afterwards, you'll feel like a beauty. And you'll have a power over people. . . .

SONYA *ecstatically*: Talk to me about him.

HELENA: What shall I say?

SONYA: Say he's clever, that he can do everything. He can cure the sick, and make new forests.

HELENA: He's more than that, my dear. He's a man of genius. And do you know what that means—to be a man of genius? It means that he is brave, that his mind has wings, that he has a tolerant heart. He plants a little tree, and his mind travels a thousands years into the future and sees visions of a happy humanity. People like him are rare and should be loved. What if he drinks and acts a little rough? A great man like that can't be a little saint in our country. Just think what a life he leads. The impassable, muddy roads, the terrible forests and snowstorms, the great distances he must cover. And the people are so coarse and untrained, and there's so much poverty and illness. It's hard for a

man who works like that, fighting day after day to keep himself spotless and sober till he's forty. *She embraces Sonya.* Oh, I wish for you with all my heart—You deserve happiness. . . . As for me, I'm an empty, superficial woman. I've always been superficial . . . in music, in love, in my husband's house . . . in everything. When you come to think of it, Sonya, I'm very, very unlucky. . . . Why do you laugh?

SONYA *laughing and hiding her face in her hands:* I'm so happy . . . so happy. . . .

HELENA: Oh, I want to be happy, too . . . I want to hear music. I wish I could play something. . . .

SONYA: Oh, play . . . I don't want to go to sleep. Do play something.

HELENA: I'd like to. Maybe your father . . . Oh, but anyway go and ask him. If he doesn't mind, I'll play. *She is at the piano, opening the cover.* It's so long since I've played. I'd like to play and cry like a fool . . . cry over the keys . . . Sonya!

SONYA: I'll go . . . and be right back.

HELENA: Wait . . . let's decide first what we're going to play. Then when you come back, we'll be ready. Oh, we'll have such a good time. What shall we play for crying?

SONYA: Can you play the "Song of Azra"? I'd like to sing it.

HELENA and SONYA *singing*: "And my tribe is called the Azra, who when loving, die if thwarted. . . ."

HELENA *laughing*: Oh, that will break our hearts.

SONYA: Let's be awfully sad. *They laugh.*

HELENA: Oh, I haven't had such a good time in years. . . . Go, and don't be long. *Sonya goes. Helena, alone, hums slightly and waltzes giddily around the stage.*

SONYA *returning*: He said "No."

ACT II

The same room. Daylight. A month later.

Sonya enters and looks over a small tray of cards and letters. She puts the cards in a bowl on the piano. Helena comes in through a French window.

SONYA: Madame Stepanov called this morning while we were out.

HELENA *very vague*: Stepanov—which one is she?

SONYA *laughingly*: The one who is always telling you to drink kumiss. Don't you remember? She comes from the Buguruslan in Bashkiria, and she is always talking about it.

HELENA: Isn't there anybody around here who comes from Moscow?

SONYA: No, poor dear. But if there is anyone from Moscow visiting anybody, we're sure to meet them at Madame Stepanov's party. Everybody goes there. She must be awfully anxious for you to come. She probably drove out just to remind us.

HELENA: Oh, is it today?

SONYA: Tonight. It's her husband's birthday.

HELENA *a pause*: Here it's autumn already. . . . How are we ever going to live through the winter?

SONYA: Are the winters nice in Moscow?

HELENA: Oh, yes! You wear your new furs and tailored costumes and go calling. You don't get cold because you never have to ride very far. Oh, it's so gay. And there are ever so many parties and the theatre and the ballet.

SONYA: Poor Helena. You feel bored here. You don't know what to do with yourself, do you?

HELENA *smiling with no enthusiasm*: Well, today we have the birthday party to go to.

SONYA: You don't want to go, do you?

HELENA *shaking her head slowly from side to side and smiling*: . . . Do you?

SONYA *sadly*: No.

HELENA *studying her*: Is the doctor here?

SONYA: Yes . . . he's here. He comes here every day now. I don't know what it is—but we've gotten so lazy—all of us. Even I've gotten lazy. I can't help it.

HELENA: Is he really neglecting his work? . . . the doctor, I mean?

SONYA: Yes . . . He is. *Vanya enters*. And there's Uncle Vanya. He doesn't do a thing; he just follows you around like a shadow.

VANYA: As a matter of fact I am engaged on a very important errand. I have a message for you.

HELENA: A message—from whom?

VANYA *sententiously*: The gracious professor has asked me to express his desire that today we all foregather in this room at one o'clock. It is now a quarter to one. It seems he wants to enlighten the world about something.

HELENA: It's obviously some business matter.

VANYA: He hasn't any business. All he's got to do is write masterpieces.

HELENA: My dear Vanya—do you know, you're very tiresome.

VANYA *playfully*: Don't be angry, my sweet. Do you know what I'll do? As a token of peace and harmony I'll bring you some roses I gathered for you this morning—autumn roses—beautiful, sorrowful roses.

SONYA: Do that, Uncle Vanya. I'm sure sad roses are just what Nellie needs—and one desperate rose for me. *He goes out.* I'm glad he went . . . I wanted to talk to you.

HELENA: What about?

SONYA: About . . . *She hangs her head.*

HELENA *smooths her hair*: Oh, don't, don't, Sonya. Don't . . .

SONYA: I'm not even goodlooking.

HELENA *stroking her hair*: You have lovely hair.

SONYA: Don't. That only makes it worse. *She goes to look at herself in the glass.* It's when a woman is really ugly that people say "You have lovely hair, you've got fine eyes." I've been in love with him now for six years . . . I've loved him more than I loved my mother. I seem to hear him beside me every minute of the day. I feel the pressure of his hand on mine. Whenever I look at the door, my heart stops, I think he's coming in. And if I come to you as I do, it's only to speak of him. Yes, he's here every day now, but he never looks at me, he doesn't even see me. Oh, it's agony. I have absolutely no hope, none, none at all. *Despairingly.* Oh my God, give me strength . . . I prayed all last night . . . Sometimes I go up to him, speak to him, look into his eyes . . . I haven't any pride any more, I can't even control myself. Yesterday I couldn't be silent any more and I told Uncle Vanya . . . Even the servants know it. That I love him. Everyone knows.

HELENA: Does he?

SONYA: He doesn't even notice me.

HELENA: He's a strange man . . . Do you know what? Let me talk to him. I'll do it carefully, I'll only hint. Let me . . . You don't want it to drag on any longer, do you? All this uncertainty . . . Will you let me? *Sonya nods her head affirmatively.* Oh, that's good . . . whether he loves you or not. It won't be hard to find out. Don't be ashamed, my love, don't worry. I'll ask him so carefully, he won't even notice. We just want to find out, whether it's yes, or no. *Pause.* And if it's no, then he must not come back any more . . . isn't that so? *Sonya nods her head affirmatively.* It will be easier, if you don't see him. We won't put it off any more; we'll ask him right away. He was going to show me some drawings. Go and tell him I want to see him.

SONYA *violently agitated*: Will you tell me the whole truth?

HELENA: Yes, of course. It seems to me that the truth, whatever it is, will be less terrible than this uncertainty.

SONYA: Yes, yes. I'll say . . . that you want to see his drawings. *She goes, but stops before the door.* No, the uncertainty is better. Then, at least one can hope.

HELENA: What is it?

SONYA: Nothing. *She exits.*

HELENA: No . . . nothing is worse than knowing someone else's secret when one can't help them. He doesn't love her . . . that's obvious. But why shouldn't he marry her? She's so clever and pure, and good . . . she'd make a splendid wife for a country doctor of his years. *A pause.* Oh, I understand just how she feels, poor child; she lives in this boredom . . . this desperate loneliness, with nobody around except these colorless people . . . And then . . . once in a while appears this Dr. Astrov, so different, so handsome, so interesting, so charming. It's like seeing the moon rise on a dark night. . . . I think I'm a little in love with him myself . . . Yes . . . I'm lonely when he isn't here, and when I think of him I smile. . . . Oh to be free as a bird, to fly away from all your sleepy faces and your talk and forget that you ever existed at all. But I'm a coward. I'm afraid. My conscience tortures me. He comes here every day now, and I can imagine why, and I feel as if I'm guilty already . . . I'm ready to fall on my knees before Sonya, and beg her forgiveness . . . and weep. *Astrov enters, carrying a portfolio.*

ASTROV: Hello. You wanted to see my work?

HELENA: Yesterday you promised to show me your sketches. Are you free?

ASTROV: Of course I am. *He opens the portfolio.* But these aren't drawings, you know. *He takes a map out, and fixes it to the table with thumb-tacks.* You don't know much about the country, do you?

HELENA: I was born in St. Petersburg.

ASTROV: Educated there?

HELENA: Yes, at the conservatory.

ASTROV *shyly*: This is what I've been working on in there—in Vanya's room. But nobody else has seen it. When I'm not there, it's carefully hidden away. I have my own table in there, you know. When I would get absolutely too exhausted to go on, I used to drop everything and rush over here to forget myself in this work for an hour or two. It was all the enjoyment I had. Ivan and Sonya would sit there doing their sums, Marina. . . . knitting and mumbling about the healing qualities of heaven and raspberries in tea, and I would sit beside them and paint, feeling warm and peaceful. . . . There's a cricket in that room, you know . . . I didn't allow myself this luxury very often. I used to come here about once a month . . . before you came.

HELENA *softly*: I know.

ASTROV *looking down at the maps and forcing his attention on them. Sardonicly boasting*: You might call this the history of the human race . . . in

our district. I have drawn these three—well—maps, you might call them, but to me they seem almost like paintings of the country. The first one shows the land as it was fifty years ago. If you could only see how beautiful it was. Like a fairytale of Lermontov's. Well here, for instance, this lake. Great flocks of swans and geese lived here quite untouched. It was their country, you see. It seems to me almost human, as if they had a language of their own. Do you ever watch geese? They talk all the time, and after a while they seem quite understandable, like the geese that warned Rome. . . . All this green represents forests. Half the map, you see is covered with it. The blue shows horses and cattle. Now look at the second map. The kingdom of the swans has disappeared. Only a third of the map is green now with forestry. This is the province as it was twenty-five years ago. Vanya tells me that they still saw elk and wild goats in the forests at this time, but there weren't enough for me to even chart them. Of course they're all gone now. The blue paint is lighter, and so on and so on. Now we come to the third part: the country-side of today. Where are the Lermontov forests, the wild birds that flew in flocks like clouds? You don't see them. And all the old landmarks are gone—the monasteries, the mill-ponds and the old settlements. You might say that this is progress, that the old order must give

place to the new, and I would say you were right, if for instance, railroads had been cut through these ruined forests, or schools and factories had taken their place. Then the people would have been better off, healthier and more educated. But, of course, nothing like that has happened. We still have the same swamps and mosquitoes, the same disease, poverty, typhoid, the same conflagrations wiping out old Russia. It is the degeneration of our country brought on by too fierce a struggle for existence. You can't condemn them. . . . It's simply a case of man, sick and shivering and hungry, snatching at nature instinctively, laying his hands on anything he can that might warm him for the moment, or satisfy his hunger for the day . . . But I can see you're not listening to me.

HELENA: I know so little about such things.

ASTROV: There is nothing to know. It simply doesn't interest you, that's all.

HELENA: Frankly, my thoughts were on something else. Forgive me, I've got to put you through a little cross-examination, and I'm embarrassed. I don't know how to begin.

ASTROV: A cross-examination?

HELENA: A very innocent one. Sit down. *They sit.* It's about a young girl I know. Let's just talk about

it plainly, like honest people, like friends . . . And then let's just forget about what was said, can't we? It's about my step-daughter, Sonya. Do you like her?

ASTROV: I respect her.

HELENA: Do you like her—as a woman?

ASTROV *not at once*: No.

HELENA: I'll just say a few words—and that'll be all. Didn't you ever notice—anything?

ASTROV: No—nothing.

HELENA: You don't love her. I can see it in your eyes. . . . She's so unhappy. Please understand that . . . and don't come here any more. *Astrov stands. He is embarrassed.* Ugh. What a difficult task that was. . . . I'm shaking as if I had been carrying a thousand pounds. . . . Thank God, that's over. Now let's forget all about it, as though we hadn't said a word . . . and you—go away. You're so wise . . . you understand. Why, I'm actually blushing.

ASTROV: It's too bad she's unhappy. . . . Well, of course she must be . . . but there's one thing I don't understand—why you had to open the subject at all.

HELENA: I thought that—maybe—you loved her.

ASTROV: How could you think that? *There is a pause, in which she meets his eyes.* Don't you know why I've been coming here every day . . . on whose account?

HELENA: Yes . . . I know.

ASTROV: I'm glad. I've wanted so many times to tell you. . . . But I've been too sorry for you.

HELENA: Oh . . . please. Everyone is sorry for me. Not you—

ASTROV: I don't mean on account of your marriage. I mean on my own account. I've been too sorry to burden you. We've all looked at you so greedily, as if you were a cake of perfumed soap, and we all wanted to wash ourselves clean with it, forgetting that, in the process, the cake of soap would be washed away. But now . . . that you know . . . I'm glad. It's better, isn't it?

HELENA *soberly*: Yes . . . it's better.

ASTROV *desperately*: Helena? . . . *She shakes her head negatively.*

ASTROV: I'll go away today, and never come back. Yes. I can hardly get accustomed to that yet. When I think how different it might be—

HELENA: Don't think it. It could never happen.

ASTROV: At least if I could see you from time to time. . . .

HELENA: You must stay away . . . on her account.

ASTROV: Yes, of course . . . I almost forgot about the . . . cross-examination. It seems so long ago. You said that she . . . Funny . . . if you had spoken to me a month ago, I might have considered it.

HELENA *sorrowfully*: Oh, she might have been so happy. . . .

ASTROV: Helena. No. I can't go like this. I must see you, just once more. I swear to you, I'll respect you. But where can we see each other tomorrow? Tell me . . . quickly . . . where? I promise you, I'll not make love to you. But to give up everything without a word, without ever speaking to each other!—I can't. It's too much.

HELENA *blankly*: No. We must not.

ASTROV: You're right. Of course you're right. A rendezvous—what would it amount to, anyway? A little scene in a comedy . . . a pose of gallantry on my part . . . a few regretful words from you—perhaps even a few tears—and in the end, I would

find myself on my knees—pleading with you. . . .
Oh, how wonderful, how exquisite you are. Your hands . . . *He kisses them.* One kiss. If I could only kiss your hair.

HELENA: You see . . . You forgot yourself.

ASTROV: Tell me . . . tell me . . . where we can meet tomorrow? *He embraces her.* You see . . . it's inevitable. *He kisses her. Vanya enters.*

HELENA *lays her head on Astrov's shoulder*: Have pity . . . leave me. . . .

ASTROV: Tomorrow . . . at two o'clock . . . in the far woods. Will you . . . Will you come?

HELENA *sees Vanya*: Let me go. *Confused, she goes to the window.* This is appalling!

VANYA *lays the bouquet on a chair and agitatedly wipes his face*: Nothing. . . . It was nothing. *There is a long pause.*

ASTROV *as he takes together his papers, quietly*: You know . . . Vanya . . . the frightening thing about epidemics is that they can hit anybody. There are some of us that feel proud of ourselves, and for some reason, we always believe we're immune. . . . We think we're not marked out for diseases, or any troubles, and we walk around with our heads held high. . . . And then we fall down like the rest, and

somewhere in the world—or in the skies—equilibrium is established. *Pause.* We've had a fine autumn. *He goes out.*

HELENA *going quickly to Vanya*: You must try . . . you must do everything in your power to see that my husband and I go away from here today. Do you hear? This very day!

VANYA: What? Oh . . . yes . . . all right. . . . Helena, I saw everything.

HELENA: Do you hear me? I must get away from here at once. *Enter Serebrakoff and Telegin.*

TELEGIN *enthusiastically*: I seem to have gotten your illness, Professor! There isn't a symptom you've described for the last two days that I haven't had myself. It's funny, your speaking of a headache now. Why, that's what I've got myself.

SEREBRAKOFF: Where are the others? I don't like this house. It's a regular labyrinth. Twenty-six enormous rooms, everybody wandering in different directions. . . . One can never find a soul. Ask Madame Voinitzkaya and my wife to come here.

HELENA *quietly*: I am here. *Sonya enters from the French window at the back of the stage.*

SEREBRAKOFF: Please sit down, everybody.

SONYA *to Helena, agitatedly*: What did he say?

HELENA: I'll tell you later.

SONYA: You're trembling . . . you're upset . . . Oh, I understand. He said he wouldn't come here any more . . . Is that it? Is that what he said? *Helena nods affirmatively. The two women separate, and throughout the ensuing scene they sit silent, each with her own thoughts, scarcely hearing what goes on.*

SEREBRAKOFF *making himself comfortable at the table in the foreground*: One can become reconciled, after all, to being an invalid, but what I can't get used to is the whole business of life in the country. I feel as if I had been whirled off the earth on to some strange planet. Sit down, sit down, please, all of you. Sonya! *She doesn't hear him; she remains with her head sadly bowed.* Sonya! She doesn't hear me. *Madame Voinitzkaya comes in.* Ah, maman! *She and Telegin sit on both sides of the professor and give him the illusion of an audience.* Now . . . I crave your indulgence, ladies and gentlemen. Hang your ears, as I used to say in my classroom, *he smiles fatuously, on the peg of attention.*

VANYA *He has been standing apart, as if stunned by the scene he had witnessed. Now the professor's kittenishness seems more than he can bear*: I'm not needed, am I? I want to go . . .

SEREBRAKOFF *unctuously*: My dear boy, you're needed more than any of the others.

VANYA *shouts*: What do you want of me?

SEREBRAKOFF *hypocritically blind*: What? But what are you so angry about? If it's anything I've done, I wish you'd forgive me.

VANYA *out of control*: Oh, drop that and come to business. What do you want?

SEREBRAKOFF *imperviously*: Ladies and gentlemen! I shall begin. I have brought you together here, my friends, to tell you that the coming year is the year of the great comet. *He laughs feebly and academically, thus giving us a picture of the Great Man in his Past.* No . . . all joking aside, this is a serious matter. I want to ask all of you for your assistance and advice, and, knowing your invariable kindness, I think I can count on both. I myself am a studious, bookish fellow, and have always felt myself a stranger to practical affairs. I can't get along without the guidance of enlightened people, and so I beg you, Ivan— *Marina enters.* Do sit down, Marina, and stop snapping your teeth—and you, Ilya, and you, maman—I beg all of you to listen to what I have to say. *Manet omnes una vox*—that is to say—we are all in the hands of the Lord. I am old, ill, and I realize that now is the time for me to settle

my worldly affairs, at least, in so far as they concern my family. My life is finished. I am not thinking of myself, but of my young wife, and my little girl—my child. *Pause.* I find, on the one hand, it is impossible to continue living in the country. We weren't made for country life. Yet, on the other hand, neither can we live in the city, as our income from this estate is too small for my station in life. We might of course, sell the woods. Yes, we might do that. But that is a critical measure, and we could hardly do it every year. And so, after weighing the situation carefully—pro and con—I have come to the conclusion that we must find some means of guaranteeing to ourselves a permanent, and more or less definite, yearly income, sufficient for our needs. This means I have considered, and now have the honor to submit it for your consideration. Our estate yields on an average not more than two per centum of its capital value. Now it seems to me—of course I am not, as one might say, fully conversant with such matters—but it seems to me that that is very little to earn on one's capital. What I propose, is to sell it, invest the money in suitable securities, get five or six per cent on our money, thus trebling our income, and we might even save a few thousand for the purchase of a small but suitable cottage in Finland.

VANYA: Wait a minute. . . . Repeat that. . . . I couldn't have heard you right. . . .

SEREBRAKOFF: I said we would try to keep back a surplus to buy a small cottage in Finland.

VANYA *insanely*: No . . . not Finland . . . Something else . . . You said something else.

SEREBRAKOFF *precisely*: I propose selling this place.

VANYA *his emotions let loose*: That's what it was. You'll sell the estate. Fine. That's a great idea. And what do you propose to do with my old mother, and me, and Sonya here?

SEREBRAKOFF: That will all be decided at the proper time. We can't go into every phase of it at once.

VANYA: Wait . . . It begins to look as if up to now I wasn't quite sane. Up to now I was idiot enough to think that the estate belonged to Sonya, as well as you. My father bought it as a wedding present for my sister, and as I have been naïve enough to think that our laws were made for Russians and not for Turks, I also believed my sister's estate would come down to her child.

SEREBRAKOFF: Of course it belongs to my child. Who denies it? I'm not going to sell it without her consent. On the contrary, what I am doing is for her good.

VANYA: It's unbelievable—unbelievable. Either I've gone mad . . . or . . .

MME. VOINITZKAYA: Ivan, don't contradict Alexander. Believe me, he knows better what's right and what's wrong.

VANYA: I won't. Give me some water. Go ahead, talk, say anything you want . . . anything.

SEREBRAKOFF: What I don't understand is, why you should get so upset. I don't say that my plan is perfect. In fact, if everybody finds it objectionable, I'm not going to insist. *A pause.*

TELEGIN *haltingly*: I have always felt the greatest of respect, practically reverence, for learning, Your Excellency. I've even been connected with education, in my own humble way . . . my brother Gregory's wife's brother, whom you may know, his name is Constantin Lakedemonoff, had a university degree—M. A., I think it was.

VANYA *bellows*: Stop, Waffle, for God's sake. . . .

TELEGIN *excitedly*: I will, Vanya, I will. *But he can't, nevertheless, and pounding his own chest in illustration, cries out to the professor, accusingly.* But there is also such a thing as natural feeling!

VANYA *to Serebrakoff*: Yes, you may as well listen to him. This estate was bought from his uncle.

SEREBRAKOFF: Why should I? What for? What good would it do?

VANYA: In those days this estate brought a price of ninety-five thousand rubles. My father paid seventy thousand, and there was a mortgage of 25,000. Now listen . . . This estate could never have been bought if I had not renounced my share of my father's capital in favor of my sister, whom I loved deeply. What's more, I worked for ten years like an ox, and paid off the whole mortgage.

SEREBRAKOFF: I regret that I ever began this conversation.

VANYA: This estate is free of debts and in good condition only because of my renunciation, my work and my strength. And now that I've grown old here you want to throw me out by the neck.

SEREBRAKOFF: I don't know what you're driving at.

VANYA: For twenty-five years I've managed this estate, I worked and sent you all the profits like the most conscientious caretaker, and in all that time you never thanked me once. All that time, in my youth and now, I got the same salary from you—five hundred rubles a year, a beggar's pittance, and you never even thought of adding one ruble to it.

SEREBRAKOFF: What did I know about such things, Ivan? I'm not a practical man and understand nothing of that kind. You might have helped yourself to all you wanted.

VANYA: Yes. Why didn't I steal? You ought to despise me, because I didn't steal. It would have been just, and now I wouldn't be a beggar.

MME. VOINITZKAYA: Ivan!

TELEGIN *excitedly*: Vanya, my dear friend, don't talk like that. Why spoil such pleasant relations?

VANYA: For twenty-five years I've been buried here with my mother, like a mole. All our thoughts and feelings were for you. By day we spoke of you, of your works, we pronounced your name with veneration, we boasted about you. And in the nights, instead of getting our needed rest, or at least some worthwhile knowledge, we read the books and papers for which I now have only the deepest contempt.

TELEGIN: Don't, Vanya, my boy, don't. I can't stand it.

SEREBRAKOFF *angrily*: What in the name of heaven do you want, anyway?

VANYA: We used to think you were some kind of superman, and we knew your works practically by heart. But now my eyes are opened. I see through

you. You write about art and you don't know a damn thing about art. All your works that I admired so much aren't worth a copper penny. You're a hoax!

SEREBRAKOFF: Someone stop him, won't you? I'm going.

HELENA: Ivan, I command you to stop. Do you hear?

VANYA: I will not stop! *To Serebrakoff.* Wait, I'm not through. You've wrecked my life. I've never lived, thanks to you. The best years of my life have been ruined—murdered!

TELEGIN: I can't stand it. I can't stand it. I'm going. *He leaves.*

SEREBRAKOFF: But what do you want? What earthly right have you to use such language to me. Ruined? If this estate is yours, then take it and let me be ruined.

HELENA: This is too much! I've got to get out of this hell. *Exits.*

VANYA: You've wrecked my life. I had talent, enough intelligence. If I had led a decent life I might have become another Schopenhauer, a Dostoievsky. Oh, my head, I'm raving, I'm going crazy. Mother, I'm in despair, Mother. . . .

MME. VOINITZKAYA: Obey Alexander. *Sonya kneels before Marina with her head in her lap.*

VANYA: Mother, what am I to do? No . . . don't tell me. You don't have to tell me. I know what I must do. . . . *To Serebrakoff.* You'll find out who I am! *He goes out. His mother follows him.*

SEREBRAKOFF: Tell me what on earth does it all mean, anyway! That maniac will have to be removed from here. I'm not going to live under the same roof with him. His room is practically next to mine as it is. Let him go and live in the village, or in the wing, or I'll have to move. But live in the same house with him I cannot.

HELENA: We'll be leaving today. We must start packing this minute.

SEREBRAKOFF: What a perfectly dreadful fellow.

SONYA is on her knees and turns to speak to her father: You should be kind to us, Father. Uncle Vanya and I are so unhappy. *With difficulty, controlling herself.* Try to be kindhearted. Remember, how Uncle Vanya and grandmother used to stay up nights to translate books for you . . . copy your manuscripts . . . night after night. . . . Uncle Vanya and I have worked without resting, we were afraid to spend a penny on ourselves, we sent it all to you. We didn't eat the bread of idleness. But I'm

not reproaching you, I'm not reproaching . . . oh, people ought to be kinder, they ought to be kinder.

HELENA *excitedly to her husband*: Alexander! For heaven's sake go and have some sort of talk with him—explain.

SEREBRAKOFF: All right. I shall do my best to straighten it out with him. I won't reproach him for anything. I'm not angry, but you must admit that his behavior was strange, to say the least. Excuse me, I shall return in a moment.

HELENA: Be gentle with him, try to quiet him.

SONYA: Oh, nurse, nurse.

MARINA: It's all right, my little one. When the geese have cackled, they will be still again. First they cackle, and then they stop.

SONYA: Oh, nurse.

MARINA *smooths her hair*: You're shivering just as if you were frozen. . . . There, there, my little orphan babe; God is good. A little lime-flower tea, or raspberries in hot water, and you'll feel better. Don't grieve, my orphaned baby. See, the geese have gone their ways, bad luck to them. *There is a pistol shot back stage, and Helena is heard screaming. Sonya shudders.*

MARINA *spits*: Devil take them!

SEREBRAKOFF *runs in shaking with fright*: Hold him, hold him, he's gone out of his mind. *In the doorway Helena and Vanya are struggling.*

HELENA: Give it here, give it here, I tell you.

VANYA: Let me go, Helena, let me go. *He frees himself and rushes in, looking for the professor. The professor is trying to get his glasses on to see what's going on while he is being aimed at. Where is he? Oh, there he is! Bang! He says it as he fires. Did I miss? Did I fail again? Wildly. Oh, hell, hell, hell! He throws the revolver on the floor and drops helpless in a chair. Telegin, who has come in during the shooting, now jumps into his office of friend of the family, and with a horrified face, almost as if he believed that Serebrakoff was the transgressor, tries to take him away.*

TELEGIN *mutters all this half-audibly, leading him away*: Now, come on. Stop that. Let him alone. Now, now . . . stop it. Better get out of here. Come on. Now please. Later. You'll see him later.

SEREBRAKOFF *is off balance, because he's being led, his head is twisted around to the scene of the shooting, and he is twittering, in a high excited voice*: Did you see that? I got shot at! He shot at me. My—my legs were paralyzed . . . like in a dream. I couldn't move them at all. And he kept shooting

at me. Why you—you vagabond . . . you disreputable person you . . . You Brutus!

TELEGIN *in his respectful murmur*: Come on now. . . . Out you go, Your Excellency. . . . Let him alone.

VANYA: Oh, what am I to do, what am I to do?

SONYA: Oh, nurse . . . nurse. . . . *Marina shakes her head over the doings and clicks her teeth in silent talk.*

CURTAIN

ACT III

Vanya's room. Only two walls are shown instead of the conventional three of the stage. The two walls meet at an angle on the spectator's left. Against the left wall is Astrof's table, and, over it a small window. There is a door in that wall, and also in the other wall. In the center of the space there is a table, with chairs around it, and a student's lamp suspended over it. Other furniture: an easy chair on the right, a trunk heaped with newspapers and periodicals, a wash stand, and a map of Africa.

It is evening of the same day. Marina and Telegin are in the same room. Marina is winding some wool, and Telegin is holding it for her.

TELEGIN: Hurry, Marina. Soon they'll be calling us to say goodbye. They've ordered the horses already. I don't like to miss a goodbye. It's always so touching. . . . People are at their best then. Besides, we so seldom have anyone leaving here . . . or coming either.

MARINA: There's not much left.

TELEGIN: They're going to Moscow. They're going to live there.

MARINA: Better so.

TELEGIN: They had a scare. The professor's wife kept crying: "I won't live here another hour, we must go away, we must go away." Can you imagine anybody feeling that way about our place? "We'll go straight to Moscow," says she, "and look around for living quarters, and then we'll send for our things." They're traveling light. Yes . . . it seems, Marina, that fate has decreed for them not to live here. Those things are all decided beforehand, up there, you know.

MARINA: Better so. God must have known it would only lead to noise and shooting. Those things are a disgrace.

TELEGIN: I never thought my eyes would be witness to a scene like that. Not in this province. In Moscow . . . maybe, but then I've never been to Moscow.

MARINA: It was a shocking sight. *A pause, in which she spits to one side, very slightly and reminiscently, thus closing that episode.* Now we'll live again . . . like we used to. Eight o'clock in the morning . . . a cup of tea. One o'clock, a good big dinner. In the evening, we'll sit down to a supper. We'll do everything in its own time . . . like people . . . like Christians. *She sighs.* It's a long time since I've tasted noodles.

TELEGIN: It's a long time since anybody tasted noodles. I like a good noodle as well as anybody. I

like cabbage soup, meat balls . . . fresh bread . . . eggs, cheese . . . I wonder if I'm not getting too covetous. Today, when I was in the village, somebody in the store called after me: "Hey, you, how does it feel to live on someone else?" I felt it bitterly, very bitterly.

MARINA: You shouldn't have paid any attention to that, my son. We all live on God. And we all work hard too, all of us. You, and Vanya, and Sonya . . . where's Sonya?

TELEGIN: In the woods, with the doctor. They're looking for Ivan. It's such a sin . . . but they're afraid he might do it anyway. He might try to hurt himself.

MARINA: Where's his pistol?

TELEGIN *whispers*: I've got it hidden—in the cellar.

MARINA: What sins . . . what terrible sins. *Vanya and Astrov come in.*

VANYA *to Astrov*: Leave me alone. *To Marina and Telegin*. Please go away, leave me alone at least for one hour. I can't stand being looked at.

TELEGIN: I'm going. I'm going, Vanya. *He tiptoes out.*

MARINA *sarcastically*: Ah, the geese are cackling

again. Ga-ga-ga. *She gathers her work and leaves, cackling.*

VANYA: Leave me, will you?

ASTROV: I'd gladly go. Only of course I won't until you give back what you took from me.

VANYA: I took nothing from you.

ASTROV: Now listen . . . Stop this fooling. I've really got to go.

VANYA: I tell you—I took nothing that belongs to you.

ASTROV: All right. I'll play your game. I'll stay . . . if that's what you want. I'll do it for a while, anyway. And then, of course . . . unless you come to your senses, we'll just resort to force. We'll be obliged to tie you up and search you. I mean that quite literally.

VANYA: As you please. *Pause.* Oh to play such a fool, to shoot two times and not even get him once. For that I'll never forgive myself.

ASTROV: When you got that whim to shoot, you should have first gone into the woods and done a little target practice . . . with your own forehead for a bull's-eye.

VANYA *shrugging his shoulders*: It's strange. I attempted murder, and nobody arrests me or tries to

give me up to justice. That means, they consider me a lunatic. *With a bitter laugh.* I'm insane, but those who hide their lack of talent, their dullness and their heartlessness behind a professor's mannerisms—they're sane! Yes, those who marry old men and then deceive them right before everybody, are also sane. Do you think I didn't see you kissing her? I saw.

ASTROV: Certainly I kissed her, and this for you, my boy. *He thumbs his nose.*

VANYA: No, it's the earth that bears us that's insane.

ASTROV: That is nonsense.

VANYA: What of it? I'm a madman. I'm not responsible. I have a right to talk nonsense, haven't I?

ASTROV: That's an old trick, my boy. You're not raving, you're simply shamming. What you really are is a ridiculous clown. Long ago I used to think that every unbalanced person was mentally diseased—abnormal, but now I'm beginning to see that it's man's estate to be a fool. You're normal enough.

VANYA *covering his face with his hands*: It's humiliating. If you only knew how humiliated I feel. There isn't a pain in the world that can compare with these frightful pangs of shame. *Miserably.* It

hurts me. What can I do, what can I do? *He leans on the table.*

ASTROV: Nothing.

VANYA *as if in pain*: Oh my sweet Saviour, listen to me. I'm forty-seven years old. What if I live till sixty? That will be thirteen years. It's too long! How can I live through thirteen years? What can I do? With what can I occupy them? Oh, can't you see? *He takes Astrov's hand.* If it were only possible to live the little remnant of one's life in some new way . . . to start anew . . . to wake up on a still, bright morning, and to feel that you are living that life from its beginning, that the past is forgotten, that it has faded like smoke. . . . *He weeps.* Tell me how . . . to begin . . . with what. . . .

ASTROV: Listen, Vanya, I don't like to give advice—it sounds a bit incongruous, coming from me. But you ask for it. All right, then. Forget all that womanish, romantic stuff about a better life, and starting anew. A man should have the courage to live without hope. Give it up. I speak as a surgeon now. You'll be better off without it.

VANYA: Give up hope?

ASTROV: Completely.

VANYA *groaning*: Oh, but my heart. . . .

ASTROV *shouts*: To hell with your heart! *Then, more kindly*. It may be that the race will improve, that those who come two hundred years after us will find some better way of living. I don't know. . . . I only know that you and I . . . have only one hope left. The hope that when we're resting in our graves, we may dream . . . perhaps even dream well. . . . *He sighs*. Yes, brother. . . . There were two respectable, intelligent men in this county. You and I. And it took just a few years of this miserable life to sink us, so there's no hope for us, and here we are, groveling and floundering around like the rest . . . but don't try to talk me out of my business. Give me back what you took from me, will you?

VANYA: I took nothing from you.

ASTROV: You took a small bottle of morphine out of my medicine case. *Pause*. Listen, if you're so damned anxious to put an end to yourself as all that, go into the woods and shoot yourself. But as a favor to me, give up the morphine, or there's bound to be a lot of boring talk afterwards, and the big minds of the neighborhood will figure out that I gave it to you. . . . It will be bad enough for me to have to do the post-mortem on you. You don't suppose I'll find that amusing? *Sonya enters*.

VANYA: Leave me alone.

ASTROV: Sonya, your uncle has made away with a bottle of morphine out of my traveling case, and he won't give it back to me. Tell him that's not very sensible. I have hardly any more time. I must go.

SONYA: Uncle Vanya. Did you take the morphine?

ASTROV: He took it. *Pause.* I'm absolutely sure.

SONYA: Then give it back. Why do you want to frighten us? *Tenderly.* Give it back, Uncle Vanya. Dear, good Uncle, darling Uncle, give it back. You're so goodhearted that you'll have pity on us and give it back.

VANYA *goes to a table drawer and gives it to Astrov:* Here, take it. *To Sonya.* But we'll have to get to work, we'll have to do something right away . . . or I won't be able, I'll not be able. . . .

SONYA: Yes . . . yes . . . to work. As soon as we've seen them off, we'll get to work. *She nervously shuffles the papers on the table.* Everything is so neglected.

ASTROV *strapping the bottle into his case:* Now I can be off.

HELENA *enters:* Ivan, are you here? We'll be going in a minute. Please go to Alexander, he has something to say to you.

SONYA: Yes, go, Uncle Vanya. *She takes him by the arm.* You and father must make peace. That must be done. *The two leave.*

HELENA: I am going away. *She gives Astrov her hand.* Goodbye.

ASTROV: Already?

HELENA: The carriage is waiting.

ASTROV: Goodbye.

HELENA: Today you promised me that you would go away yourself.

ASTROV: I haven't forgotten. I'm going at once. *Pause.* Were you so frightened? *He takes her hand.* Was it so terrible?

HELENA: I was frightened.

ASTROV: If you could only stay? Couldn't you? Tomorrow . . . in the forest . . .

HELENA: No. It's settled. . . . That's why I can face you so bravely, because it's all settled. I just want to ask you one thing. . . . Don't think too badly of me. I should like you to respect me.

ASTROV: Ugh, respect. . . . *He makes an impatient gesture.* Stay . . . I want you to. Confess to yourself that you have nothing to do in this world, you have no object in life, there is nothing to occupy

your attention, and sooner or later you must give way to your passions. It's inevitable. And it would be better, if it happened, not in Moscow, where you don't matter so much, but here, where you would be everything to me. . . . And think how beautiful it is here. . . . *Perhaps a little sardonically.* The woods, the half-ruined country-side in the style of Turgenieff.

HELENA: How absurd you are. I'm angry at you . . . and yet . . . I'll always think of you with pleasure. You're an interesting and original man. We'll never see each other again, and so—I'll tell you—why should I hide it—that I was just a little bit in love with you. And now—let me have your hand once more, in parting, like a friend. Try not to remember anything bad of me. . . .

ASTROV *pressing her hand*: Yes, go. . . . You seem to be sincere and good, and yet there is something inexplicable about your whole existence here. . . . You came here with your husband, and all of us who were busy working, doing and creating something, had to abandon our work, and spend the whole summer attending to your husband's gout and you. Both you and he have infected us with your idleness. I was carried away. All summer I haven't done a thing, while people were sick, and the peasants pastured their cattle in my woods among my young, unpro-

tected trees. *He smiles.* When you go, you and your husband will have left a trail of destruction on our landscape as definitely as if you had been a herd of elephants. I'm joking of course . . . and yet . . . it *is* strange, and I believe that if you had stayed on, the destruction would have been spectacular. I would have gone to my ruin . . . and you . . . you wouldn't have prospered. Well, go. *Finita la comedia!*

HELENA *taking a pencil from the table and quickly hiding it:* I'll take this pencil to remember you by.

ASTROV: How strange it is. We met—and now, suddenly, for some reason, it seems that we shall never see each other again. That's the way in this world. While we're still alone, and before Vanya comes in with a bouquet, as he usually does, let me . . . kiss you . . . a parting kiss. May I? *He kisses her cheek.* Now everything is fine!

HELENA: I wish you every happiness. *She glances around.* No matter what happens . . . For once in my life. *She embraces him impetuously, and both quickly separate.* I must go.

ASTROV: Go quickly. If the carriage is there, then start at once.

HELENA: They're coming here, I think. *They listen.*

ASTROV *From now on the lovers never look at one*

another again: Finita! Serebrakoff, Vanya, Mme. Voinitzkaya, Telegin and Sonya enter.

SEREBRAKOFF: Let bygones be bygones; there's a good rule. As a result of what happened today, I've covered so much ground, both in thought and feeling, that I believe I could write a complete treatise on how to live, for the instruction of posterity. I gladly accept your apologies, and apologize myself. Goodbye. *He kisses Vanya.* You will receive regularly the same sum that you received before. Everything will be as before. *Helena embraces Sonya. Serebrakoff kisses Mme. Voinitzkaya's hand. Maman.*

MME. VOINITZKAYA: Alexander, please have your picture taken again and send it to me. You know how dear you are to me.

TELEGIN: Goodbye, Your Excellency. Don't forget us.

SEREBRAKOFF *kissing his daughter*: Goodbye . . . goodbye all. *Shakes hands with Astrov.* Many thanks for your pleasant company. *To everybody.* I shall take with me an actual respect for your ways of thought, your enthusiasms, your . . . impulses, but allow an old man to add one little observation at parting: One must work, my friends, one must work! Good luck to all of you. *He goes out, followed by Mme. Voinitzkaya and Sonya.*

VANYA *kissing Helena's hand*: Goodbye . . . forgive me. . . . We'll never see each other again.

HELENA *touched*: Goodbye, poor boy. *She kisses his head and goes out.*

ASTROV *to Telegin*: Will you tell them, Waffle, to bring my carriage, too.

TELEGIN: Yes, Doctor, certainly. *He goes. Only Astrov and Vanya are left.*

ASTROV *picking up crayons and putting them away*: Why don't you go and see them off?

VANYA: Let them go. But I—I can't . . . I must get to work on something quickly. To work . . . to work. *He rummages among the papers on his table. There is a pause. Bells are audible.*

ASTROV: They're gone. The professor's glad, I bet. You couldn't coax him back here again. Not any more than you could get him to walk into hell.

MARINA *comes in*: They're gone. *She sits in a rocker and knits.*

SONYA *enters*: They're gone. *She wipes her eyes.* God speed them. *To Vanya.* And now, Uncle Vanya, let's do something.

VANYA: Yes, we must work, we must work. . . .

SONYA: It's so long, so long, since we have worked together at this table. . . . *She lights a lamp on the*

table. Wait, there isn't much ink. She goes to the cupboard and fills the inkstand. How sad it is that they have gone away.

MME. VOINITZKAYA *comes in slowly*: They're gone. *She goes out through the other door.*

SONYA *seated at the table is looking through an account book*: First of all, let's do the accounts. They're in a dreadful state. Someone asked for his account today. We hadn't sent it. We must get them all up.

VANYA *writes*: To Mr. Aksakov . . . I'll do his account, you do the next meanwhile. *They both write.*

MARINA *yawning*: Oh, I could go to bed. . . .

ASTROV: How still it is. The pens scratch, the cricket chirps, it's so warm and cozy . . . I hate to go. . . . *Bells are heard. Well, there's my carriage. All that's left is to say goodbye to you, my friends, say goodbye to my table—and away! He puts the map into his portfolio.*

MARINA: Don't hurry away. Sit down a bit.

ASTROV: Impossible.

VANYA *writes*: Balance unpaid from July . . . two seventy-five. *A workman enters.*

WORKMAN: The carriage is waiting, Doctor.

ASTROV: I'll be right with you. *He gives him medicine case, bag and portfolio.* Here, take these. Be careful, don't crush the portfolio.

WORKMAN: Yes, sir. *He exists.*

ASTROV: Well!— *He comes forward to say good-bye.*

SONYA: When shall we see you again?

ASTROV: Not before next summer, I think. Of course, if anything happens, let me know, and I'll come. . . . *He shakes hands with everybody.* Thanks for bread, salt, kindness, for everything. *He goes to Marina and kisses her hand.* Goodbye, nurse.

MARINA: You're not going this way, without a drop of tea?

ASTROV: I don't want any . . . thanks.

MARINA: Then, a little drop of vodka?

ASTROV *undecided*: Maybe. . . . *Marina goes out.* *A pause.* One of my horses is a little lame. I noticed it yesterday already, on the way here.

VANYA: You should have him re-shod.

ASTROV: Yes, I'll have to stop at the blacksmith's on the way home. It can't be helped. *He goes up to the map of Africa and looks at it.* I imagine that in

Africa right now the heat must be something terrific.

VANYA: Yes . . . probably. *Marina comes back carrying a tray with a glass of vodka and a piece of bread.*

MARINA: Your health, my son. . . . Ah, take a bite of bread with it.

ASTROV *having emptied glass*: No . . . that's enough . . . and now . . . goodbye. You needn't see me out, nurse. It isn't necessary. *He goes out, whistling pensively. Sonya has impetuously taken a candle and followed him to see him out. Marina takes her place in the chair.*

VANYA *writes*: September the second. . . . Twenty pounds of butter, September the tenth, twenty pounds again. . . . September the sixteenth, fifty pounds of buckwheat flour. . . . There . . . that one is up to date. *The bells sound.*

MARINA: He is gone. *A pause.*

SONYA *enters*: He's gone.

VANYA: . . . and nine is twenty-seven, and six, is thirty-three. Total, thirty-three twenty-five. *Sonya sits and writes.*

MARINA *yawns*: Hah—The Lord have mercy. *Telegin comes in on tiptoes, takes a seat near the door and softly fixes his guitar.*

VANYA *smoothing Sonya's hair*: Oh my child, I'm so miserable, if you only knew how miserable I am.

SONYA: What can we do? We must go on living. Yes . . . Uncle Vanya . . . We shall live. We shall live through the long procession of days before us, and the long evenings, we shall bear patiently the trials that fate has in store for us. We shall work for others, now and when we're old, without rest. And when our hour arrives we shall die quietly, and there, beyond the grave, we shall say that we have suffered, that we wept, that life was bitter here below. And God will have mercy on us, and then, Uncle, dear Uncle, we shall see that bright and beautiful life, that heavenly life. We shall rejoice; and look back on our sorrows here with tenderness, with tender smiles . . . we shall rest. I have faith, Uncle, fervent, passionate faith. *Telegin plays softly*. We shall rest. . . . *She speaks gently*. Why, my poor, poor Uncle Vanya, you are crying. You have never known what happiness was, but wait, Uncle Vanya, wait . . . We shall rest. We shall hear the angels. We shall see heaven in all its radiance, with all its shining streets. We shall see all evil, and all our suffering sink away in the great mercy that shall unfold the world. And we shall be happy. We shall be happy because we shall have everything. . . . The wheat fields will be there, and the blue cornflowers—

And the woods in the spring! And Mother, and those we loved . . . and who loved us in return . . . And those who, in this existence, didn't love us. *She sobs suddenly.* They'll love us . . . They'll want us . . . *She weeps passionately, agonizedly. This is the suffering about which, in that future, she will speak to God. This, and not the other, is the truth. And so she weeps.*



Rate - young
Helen - Harry - Emily
mother - Bell
Throate - Giller - Clark
margaret - Lusy
Peter - Bonnet
Major Clinton - White - Clark
Ward - of the - in 3 months
Ward - of the - Garrison
Ward - of the - Baker

